

Make your complaint heard

A student nurse is working at a Mental Health Centre. A newspaper publishes a story about a patient at the Centre whose life has ended in suicide. It says that the day the patient died the student nurse had told her to 'go away and pull herself together'. Imagine how the student nurse feels when she reads this knowing that, although she did see the patient on the day she died, she simply did not say such a thing. Thank goodness there is a way to put the record straight. The Mental Health Centre complains to the Press Complaints Commission and as a result the paper publishes an apology and a correction indicating that the suicide was in no way related to the contact with the student nurse.

A doctor at a surgery in East Anglia complains to the PCC that a local newspaper has inaccurately claimed that some time ago he gave notice to the local PCT to quit the surgery. He points out that in fact he had repeatedly offered the PCT the opportunity

to continue an NHS service at the surgery and that he presently runs an NHS practice there. The matter is resolved when the newspaper publishes a front page apology, with a link to a letter from the complainant setting out his views on a new medical centre in more detail.

Many readers will be aware of the existence of the PCC but how many have used it or considered using it? As the real cases above show, a complaint to the Commission need not be a long drawn-out process. Indeed, the PCC's primary aim is to resolve substantive complaints which fall within its remit amicably and as quickly as possible. It will only resort to formal adjudication if attempts at mediation fail. There is no reason why you should not raise your complaint with the editor concerned directly of course, but sometimes an independent negotiator in the form of the PCC's complaints department can really help. The four main areas covered by the Code of Practice are accuracy, privacy,

newsgathering and protecting the vulnerable - all of which may apply in the reporting of healthcare.

Where should you start? Our website www.pcc.org.uk is a good place, but if you feel you want to talk through a possible complaint to the PCC in confidence, our telephone Helpline team would be pleased to talk to you on 0845 600 2757. Anyone involved in mental health care may also be interested to know that the Commission has recently updated its guidance to editors on the subject and the revised version is available on the PCC website.

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AHC Training Courses

Over the next 18 months, the AHC will be running a series of training courses that are linked in with the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF). All NHS communicators should now be working towards one of four levels for the public relations and marketing dimension of the KSF based on their job role. All the AHC courses will be geared towards a specific level of the KSF so course participants can use attendance on a course as evidence to demonstrate that they are working at, or exceeding, a particular KSF level.

Courses will cover a wide range of subjects. Introductory and intermediate level courses

will include an introduction to communications, writing better patient information, writing for the web, effective line management and presentation skills.

More advanced courses will include crisis management, managing consultation, corporate affairs for senior communicator's, training the trainer, internal communications, managing change and how to ensure the communicators voice is heard at Board level.

Full details of all the courses including dates, location (we plan to hold them throughout the country) and prices are available on the AHC website at www.assohealth.org.uk. As with all AHC courses, these courses are

specifically tailored for NHS communicators, run by trainers with NHS experience and are exceptional value for money.

Please take a look at the list of courses on the website and if you would like to book or register your interest for any of these, please contact:

Kate Baldwin, AHC Administrator on: 01525 222155 or via email at: katherine.baldwin@virgin.net

Please also let Kate know if you have any ideas for further courses, would like to offer your services as a trainer, or can help provide venues.

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