



HOSPITAL COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENTS —Valuable Assets to Promote EMS

As an EMS manager, you should always include your hospital's communications department as part of your media relations plan to help you generate visibility about who you are and what you do.

Many hospitals have in-house newsletters that they use to market themselves to the community. There are things that you can do to piggyback onto their newsletter, such as sending press releases about your activities, writing an article or creating and inserting a flyer.

At Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, California, the communications department works closely with the emergency department to publicize its annual EMS picnic during EMS Week. Companywide e-mails alert the hospital staff about the event, and a post-event article, complete with photos, in the hospital's quarterly newsletter supports EMS in the summer months.

Connie Matthews, director of marketing and communications for Huntington Hospital, said that her department promotes the picnic and other EMS activities throughout the year. "We have a close relationship with [EMS]," she said. "They're like part of the family. We work together and they're great in providing information."



POINTERS FOR BETTER HOSPITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Write an article for your hospital newsletter

Hospital newsletters are always looking for articles. Contact the communications department and offer to write for the newsletter. Write about your upcoming EMS Week activities or about emergency planning tips or injury prevention.

Remember that content is value, advised Paul DiModica, president of the management consulting firm DigitalHatch. "A newsletter is a good communications medium for you and the community you serve," said DiModica, who produces a weekly newsletter for 165,000 subscribers. "Content is a key element for any newsletter. If you give a newsletter editor good content, you provide value, and it positions you as a thought-leader."

In addition to placing articles in the hospital newsletter, don't forget about newsletters offered by specific specialty departments. For example, in larger hospitals, the internal medicine or orthopedics department might have its own newsletter.

Attend hospital staff meetings

Always report on your activities at internal hospital meetings. This is an excellent opportunity to maintain face-to-face contact with the hospital staff. Better yet, conduct your own meetings. Leaders at STAT MedEvac, an air medical transport program based in Pittsburgh, meet with their member hospitals quarterly. In addition to planning EMS Week, they discuss other outreach and marketing activities.

Susan Zimecki, associate director of communication for the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, is a member of this marketing committee. "It's a great thing that STAT does," she said. "We get informed about what's going on with them, such as what new locations are opening and what community outreach programs they're planning. As a result, we receive information to take back to our newsletter."

Issue press releases

When you have an event or activity coming up, send a press release or flyer about your event to your hospital's communications staff. "You already create press releases anyway, so you may as well send it to your hospital communication department," advised Susan Zimecki, associate director of communication for the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, which produces a newsletter that's distributed to 39,000 employees every two weeks. "When I get something from STAT MedEvac, I pay attention since I know them."

Build relationships with the communications team

If you want to have a good relationship with your local hospital communications department, get to know the people who work there. "Just stop in and say hi and get to know them," Matthews suggested. "It helps when you have that relationship because they're more likely to do what they can to help you."

Michele Cooper, vice president of planning and marketing for Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, agreed. "It's important that there's an ongoing relationship," she said. "We're looking for stories and they have stories."

Cooper, who is also on the STAT MedEvac marketing committee, recommended, "Keep the relationship ongoing and not just for a single event or point in time. We consider EMS to be an important part of the team. What they do in the field is extremely important and we view them as important partners. That's why internally we like to celebrate their accomplishments and things they've done in the community."