

TITLE: MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

PURPOSE: To provide guidance to Harris Health System workforce members (staff, medical staff, volunteers, and contractors) regarding contact with the news media.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Harris Health System (Harris Health) supports the right of citizens to have access to information about health programs and services for residents of Harris County and encourages positive relations with the news media to publicize that information. The dissemination of timely, accurate, and newsworthy information to the community in collaboration with the news media is the primary responsibility of the Harris Health's Corporate Communications Department. This is accomplished by working in coordination with Harris Health Administration and other department managers and medical staff who are subject matter experts for their respective areas. With the exception of staff that provides basic patient directory information, the Harris Health's Corporate Communications Department will consider and coordinate all news media contacts prior to providing recording access or releasing information to members of the news media.

POLICY ELABORATION:

I. DEFINITIONS:

- A. **PATIENT CONDITIONS:** A single word used to describe the general condition of a patient identified by name, including the following terms:
1. **GOOD:** Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. The patient is conscious and comfortable (indicators are excellent):
 2. **FAIR:** Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. The patient is conscious and comfortable (indicators are favorable).
 3. **SERIOUS:** Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. Patient is acutely ill (indicators are questionable).
 4. **CRITICAL:** Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. The patient may be unconscious (indicators are unfavorable).
 5. **UNDETERMINED:** Status is pending diagnostic results, physician's examination or outcome of surgery.

- B. **NEWS MEDIA:** Any newspaper, magazine, web or social media site, or television or radio station that publishes or broadcasts news account, or any person who is identified as a reporter or writer.

II. PATIENT CONDITIONS, NEWS MEDIA CONTACT AND CRISIS RESPONSE:

- A. Protecting a patient's privacy and maintaining confidentiality of patient information are of paramount importance to Harris Health. Equally important are the maintenance of a safe, orderly healthcare environment and a fair and accurate telling of the facts. Harris Health staff will release patient information and confirm treatment of patients only as allowed by federal and state privacy laws and regulations (see Use and Disclosure of Protected Health Information for Facility Directories, Policy No. 3.11.201). Harris Health staff may confirm that a patient listed in the Facility Directory is present at one of its hospitals and may describe the patient's condition by using a one-word term (as provided under Definitions) to persons asking for the patient by name. Any request for information beyond Facility Directory information requires an Authorization for Release of Information - Media, Marketing and Educational Use Form (Form No. 282758) be completed by the patient or the patient's personal representative.

- B. Death of Patient:

Harris Health will only confirm the death of a patient after next-of-kin has been notified, unless the patient's personal representative requests otherwise.

- C. Minors:

Harris Health will not release Facility Directory information regarding a minor without the written consent of a parent or legal guardian, unless Texas or federal law requires such release.

- D. Harris Health's Corporate Communications Department answers news media calls during office hours through its media hotline: **713-566-6430**. After hours and on weekends, the department's on-call representative responds to left messages on the media hotline for routine patient condition reports and emergency communications concerns.

- E. For all crisis or emergency communications responses, or for inquiries that are considered sensitive or difficult, immediately contact the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department on-call representative – who is available twenty four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week – by calling the media hotline: **713-566-6430**. Leave a callback number and brief summary of reason for the call. The voice message automatically pages the on-call representative.
- F. Any member of the Harris Health workforce (i.e., staff, medical staff, volunteer and contractors) who is contacted by the news media is to notify the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department immediately. Workforce members will not provide information or be interviewed by the news media before notifying and receiving authorization from the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department. Workforce members should be prepared to provide the Corporate Communications Department the name and contact information for the media representative and reason for the contact.

III. NEWS MEDIA ACCESS:

- A. The Director of Corporate Communications and his or her designee(s) are responsible for Harris Health's external communications with news media organizations and reporters. This includes all inquiries for interviews, press releases, statements and access requests to record images and sounds in Harris Health facilities.
- B. All requests for statements, interviews or recorded images pertaining to Harris Health shall be directed to the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department at **713-566-6430**.
- C. Any request for access to Harris Health facilities that bypasses the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department may be denied.
- D. Any event hosted by Harris Health that may involve the media, Harris Health Board of Trustees, elected officials, community leaders, or Harris Health senior administration shall be coordinated with the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department.

- E. All news media representatives (reporters, photographers or video recording teams) will be accompanied by a Harris Health Corporate Communications Department representative or his or her designee (including a media relations team member from its affiliated medical schools when approved to do so) while in a Harris Health facility. Any reporter or photographer acting alone should be restricted from moving about the facility and should be directed to immediately contact the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department. Please call **713-566-6430**, twenty four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week.
- F. In the event a physician will be interviewed, the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department will notify the respective medical school's media relations department. If the medical schools have arranged the interview, they will contact the Harris Health Corporate Communications Department to discuss and coordinate access.

IV. SPOKESPERSONS AND NEWS PROCEDURES:

- A. The official spokespersons for Harris Health System are the Chair of the Board of Trustees, as provided in the Board of Trustees Bylaws (see Article XV of the Board of Trustees Bylaws); the President and CEO; and the Director of Corporate Communications. The Director of Corporate Communications, in collaboration with the President and CEO, may designate system spokesperson(s) as appropriate, including the identification of subject matter experts.
- B. Harris Health's spokespersons shall provide accurate information to the local media and community.
- C. The Director of Corporate Communications or his or her designee(s) is responsible for approving the release of any information to the news media.
- D. Mass Casualty/Disaster: In accordance with applicable federal and state laws, Harris Health may use and disclose a patient's protected health information to inform persons involved in a patient's care or payment for care, of the patient's location, general condition, or death; or to coordinate with appropriate disaster relief organizations regarding the patient's name, location, general condition, or death.

HARRISHEALTH SYSTEM

POLICY AND REGULATIONS MANUAL

Policy No. 8.02
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Effective Date: 11/01/2011
Board Motion No. 08.11-634

Last Review Date: 08/30/2019
Due For Review 08/30/2022

REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Harris Health System Policy and Procedures 3.11.201 Use and Disclosure of PHI for Facility Directories.

Harris Health System Policy and Procedures 3.11.203 Use and Disclosure of Protected Health Information to Persons Involved in Patient's Care, and for Notification and Disaster Relief.

Harris Health Health System Policy and Procedures 3.11.601 Use and Disclosure of PHI for Marketing

Harris Health System Policy and Procedures 3.11.310 Making and Disclosing Photographic, Video, Electronic, Digital or Audio Recordings of Patients

Harris Health Board of Managers Bylaws, Article XV.

Authorization for Release of Information - Media, Marketing and Educational Use (Form No. 282758)

OFFICE OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:

Harris Health System Corporate Communications

HARRIS HEALTH SYSTEM

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REVISION HISTORY:

Effective Date	Version# (If Applicable)	Review or Revision Date	Reviewed or Approved by: (If Board of Managers Approved, include Board Motion#)
	1.0	Approved 5/16/2008	Vice President of Patient & Public Affairs
		Approved 8/01/2008	CHP Medical Executive Committee
		Approved 08/06/2008	LBJ Medical Executive Committee
		Reviewed 09/08/2008	BTGH Medical Executive Committee
		Reviewed 09/09/08	HCHD Medical Board
		Reviewed and Approved 10/07/2008	HCHD Policy Review Committee
11/09/2008		Approved 11/06/2008	HCHD Board of Managers
	2.0	Revised/ Reviewed 12/9/11	County Attorney's Office
		Approved 12/13/2011	HCHD Operations Policy Committee
	3.0	Revised/Reviewed 08/16/19	Corporate Communications
	4.0	08/30/2019 Expedited Executive Approval via Rapid Cycle	CEO
		Required Post-Approval Rapid Cycle Review Complete 03/10/2020 Approved	Structure and Organizational Standards Committee