



Individual Care Providers

Communication Top Tips during COVID-19 outbreak

20 March 2020

Top tips in communicating with staff, service users and families during the COVID-19 pandemic

While it is important to make sure that the operational activities within the care service is functioning as best as possible, it is also essential to communicate regularly with service users, friends and family and keep them informed throughout the pandemic. The frequency and format of the communication will need to be adapted for each care setting and service user groups supported.

This document has been produced to provide useful tips to help you communicate effectively during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Contents

1. [Where can I go to get the latest information and guidance?](#)
2. [What help can I get to apply the guidance to my service?](#)
3. [How do I communicate with my staff?](#)
4. [How do I communicate with my service users and their families/representatives?](#)
5. [Where do I go if I need more information, help or advice?](#)
6. [Mental health and wellbeing](#)
7. [Remote working](#)
8. [How to manage media enquiries?](#)
9. [General do's and Don'ts in handling media enquiries](#)

Where can I go to get the latest information and guidance?

The Care Provider Alliance is working closely with its members, the government and other official agencies to bring care providers the latest guidance. For the latest information and advice to support you during this outbreak visit our website at www.careprovideralliance/coronavirus

What help can I get to apply the guidance to my service?

Each [CPA member association](#) is working to support its members with the flow of information, and to address specific operational issues relating to the application of the guidance. Furthermore, your association will communicate regularly with you to keep you updated on progress and changes. Please make sure they have your most up-to-date contact information.

How do I communicate with my staff?

Inform:

- Make sure staff fully understand the steps you are taking to manage the outbreak in your service.
- Communicate to all levels of staff at meetings, handovers, message alerts, email, bulletins, etc. to make sure everybody knows the plan for managing the spread of the virus. In addition, communicate your plan with all suppliers and healthcare professionals.
- Be measured and proportionate in your communication, aiming to give staff reassurance of the steps you are taking to manage the spread of the virus, and confidence in your actions to keep them and service users safe.
- Make sure staff have a contact point for concerns or queries and know the procedure. Promptly address and answer any questions or concerns to reduce the risk of misinformation and rumours.

- Make sure that staff that are unwell follow national guidance to isolate and report absence.
- Explain to staff the process they should follow when self-isolating, particularly if you have a company policy on how this is to be managed.
- The CPA website has a wide range of resources and useful information to help you. Visit <https://www.careprovideralliance.org.uk/coronavirus.html>
- Include in your communications your company's policy on sick pay/pay whilst isolating, and where any other assistance is available.
- Ask that if staff are approached by media for commentary and opinion, that they refer them to the media contact in your organisation.

Train:

- Provide refresher training for all staff on infection prevention and control practice. Ensure staff follow national guidance, adopting good hand hygiene and maintaining a strict cleaning routine. Refer to the CPA website for the guidance on [infection prevention and control](#).
- Train all staff in the effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE). If there are any urgent issues with the need for immediate supplies, contact:

The National Supply Disruption Line

Tel: 0800 915 9964

Email: supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk

- Testing staff – to limit the spread of transmission to service users, we are pressing the government to make available test kits to enable care providers to test all staff on duty, at the start of their shift. Check the CPA website for regular updates.

How do I communicate with my service users and their families/representatives?

- Service users and families will look to your organisation to manage the COVID-19 outbreak and to keep their loved ones safe. It is therefore, essential you keep them regularly updated on the actions you are taking to manage your service.
- Initial contact – make it a priority to contact service users and their families/representatives to briefly explain the key points from your contingency action plans for managing the pandemic. The communication should be brief and clearly explain how the plan will be implemented in the service. The aim of the communication is to give confidence that you have a thought-through process of how to prevent an outbreak and clear actions on how to reduce the risks if an outbreak occurs.
- Clearly explain how you will manage visits to the service and the protocol that will be implemented in order to reduce the likelihood of transmission.
- Reassure and help to reduce anxiety and concern. It is important your communication demonstrates your commitment to doing everything you can to keep service users and staff safe during this pandemic and service users will be continuum of care.
- Communicate both verbally and in writing to clearly explain how you are keeping people safe. Break down your communication into manageable chunks for each stage of implementing your contingency plan, so as not to overwhelm, or overload with information.
- Make sure to communicate regularly to help reduce anxiety and distress.
- Give services users, families/representatives a point of contact to raise concerns or queries.

Where do I go if I need more information, help or advice?

[The CPA website](#) is updated regularly with the most up to date information. In addition, your member association will also communicate with you throughout the pandemic to make sure you always have a point of contact who will listen and support you during this period.

Mental health and wellbeing

The rapid pace of the outbreak and news reporting can be frightening for your staff and the people you support. It is important you do all you can to support staff, service users and families to maintain good mental health and wellbeing during this pandemic.

The CPA website has a detailed list of resources and advice available, to help you support your staff and service users during this challenging and difficult time. [Visit CPA Coronavirus and mental wellbeing](#) website.

Remote working

For some of your staff who may need to self-isolate, it may be possible for them to work from home. You still have a duty of care to staff working remotely and should review government guidance on this – visit the CPA website for details.

Utilise free software packages to help maintain open communications with staff. Please visit the [CPA website for further details](#).

Media enquiries

If there is an outbreak at your service there may be increased media attention and interest. This could take the form of phone calls, emails or journalists approaching staff for comment. The following guidelines are to help you neutralise negative coverage, protect the dignity of service users and their families, and help you manage the situation.

Respond quickly – make sure you are familiar with your organisation's process for handling media enquiries and that you have the full contact details of the staff

member responsible for dealing with media enquiries. If you are the main contact for media enquiries, act with honesty and integrity. Never say 'no comment' and do not hesitate to say 'sorry' where appropriate.

Advise staff to not speak to media and if approached, staff should direct media to the appropriate person.

Prepare a general media statement which you can immediately forward to the media. This should include how you are managing your service, what control measures you have in place and how you are safeguarding your service users

Be transparent – while bearing in mind any further investigations that may take place, collate factually accurate information about the incident and formulate a statement of those facts as a crib sheet for any comments you may need to make to the media. This will help you to keep on message without speculation or implicating third parties. Remember to retain people's privacy and take into account the wider considerations and implications.

Media relations – it is important to keep the media on-side as far as possible. Treat them with respect, understanding that they are a key conduit to the public and other stakeholders. While you may not be able to control the messages that the media takes to its audiences, it is essential you continue to provide open and accurate communication with your staff, service users and their families/representatives.

Empathy - although dealing with the media in a crisis can be a stressful experience it is important to consider the people you support to make sure that their dignity and respect is maintained throughout.

General Do's and Don'ts in handling media enquiries:

Do:

- Ask what the purpose of the story is so you can give an appropriate response.
- Ask what the deadline is and, if time allows request you provide written response to avoid misquotes and quotes being taken out of context.
- Deliver consistent messaging.
- Signpost to national guidance and advice.
- Ensure wording and messaging is in line with actions, matching human empathy with decisive action.
- Act with honesty and integrity and speak with facts.
- Express empathy.
- There may be some facts that you wish to and should keep private, such as the personal details of people involved – in the event of death for example.
- Reassure.

Do Not:

- Close down media channels.
- Avoid the media.
- Embellish known facts with hearsay.
- Express comments 'off the record'.
- React defensively.
- Say 'no comment'.

Disclaimer

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