

Catalyst Conversation: Communicators and Public Relations

Session Discussion Notes & Summary Guide

1. Hard-Earned Do's and Don'ts During a Contract Standoff

Discussion Question: *What are your organization's "hard-earned" do's and don'ts when it comes to influencing community perspective during a contract standoff?*

- **Do's for Standoff Communications:**
 - Collaborate with other health systems to share learnings and pay attention to industry patterns.
 - Prepare comprehensive communications ahead of time (web pages, videos, letters, FAQs) even if you don't end up needing to use all of them.
 - Be direct on timing, lean on existing media, know your realistic leverage ability, learn from others' mistakes, and always lead with empathy.
- **Don'ts for Standoff Communications:**
 - Don't fall behind the message – void waiting until it is too late.
 - Don't stay silent or say nothing.

2. Lessons Learned from Crisis Implementation

Discussion Question: *Beyond having a plan on paper, what is one "lesson learned" from a recent crisis where implementation differed from the manual?*

- **Navigating Controversial Topics & Experts:** Have experts available to comment on potentially controversial topics (such as Tylenol during pregnancy or broader topics like "what's healthy to do during pregnancy").
- **Credibility & Framing:** Ensure experts cite research and governing bodies (like ACOG or decades of research) rather than just stating "I think," and clearly introduce their credentials (e.g., "I'm a board-certified OB/GYN..."). Prepare sources for potential questions regarding sensitive issues like medical aid in dying, women's health, or gender-affirming care, where doctors may worry about their licenses.
- **Controlling the Narrative:** Leverage owned content where you can control the message, and rely on trusted community relationships and partners. Maintain

positive relationships with the state hospital association and coordinate with health departments during specific public health situations like measles.

- **Apolitical Stance:** As a nonprofit health system, general consensus points to staying apolitical, remaining mission-focused, and caring for everyone in the community.

3. Maintaining Local Trust When National Guidance Shifts

Discussion Question: *How do we maintain local credibility and trust when national guidance (e.g., CDC) shifts or becomes politically polarized?*

- **Communication Stance & Provider Guidance:**
 - Adopt a stance of “Talk to your provider” when guidance shifts.
 - Recognize that providers may feel uncomfortable with shifting CDC guidance or feel torn about going against it.
- **Leveraging Trusted Associations:**
 - Defer to specialized medical associations (such as the American Dental Association or American Academy of Pediatrics) and reference former guidance when appropriate (e.g., regarding fluoride).
 - Seek guidance internally from Chief Pharmacy Officers or Chief Medical Officers because community members look for a trusted local voice of authority.
- **Rebuilding Trust & Staying Grounded:**
 - Reinforce the core message that “We still believe in science and evidence-based care”.
 - Handle real-world operational crises directly (such as when ICE detained employees and requested hospital assistance) by helping as much as humanly possible to maintain local trust.