

PREFACE

Communicators in Public Health are typically involved in several aspects of communications, including but not limited to:

- Corporate communications (protecting brand, reputation management, ensuring we are the trusted credible source of public health information for residents, partners and stakeholders)
- Internal communications (ensuring staff and Board of Health are kept up to date with relevant information in timely ways and ensuring that organizational objectives are being met.)
- Online communications (using relevant website and social media to engage in meaningful conversations in ways that meet the public health information needs of our communities and the Health Unit)
- Media relations (defining news for target audiences, selecting the right media and tools, building relationships with media representatives)
 - media buying
 - creative services (art, copy and code)
 - Customer service (accessibility, privacy and responding to public inquiries)
- Health communications (distributing health promotion, disease prevention and risk messages to the public)
- Risk communications (identifying risks and issues early and managing them before they escalate.)
- Crisis communications (integrating crisis communication into the overall business strategy to help detect and mitigate crises, managing a communications response during an emergency.)
- Evaluation of communications as required for the above aspects

Members of the OACPH engage in activities that affect the lives and health of Ontarians. The Communicator role has the potential to powerfully influence communications that affect the lives and health of Ontarians.

Because of this, the OACPH has developed a set of Professional Standards for its members as they work to contribute to a healthy Ontario through strategic and effective communications in public health.

The OACPH Standards of Practice is a living document and may be revised from time to time as appropriate. The Professional Standards Sub-committee is tasked with keeping these Standards current. These standards shall be included as a standing agenda item at the Annual General Meeting for the OACPH and reviewed by membership and approved by Executive at that time.

PURPOSE

These Standards of Practice are intended for the individual professional communicator in public health. They are not intended to reflect the policies and practices of any member's employer. These Standards shall be reviewed on an annual basis with the membership. Members shall provide, by way of their annual renewal to the OACPH, their commitment to adhering to these professional standards and upholding the integrity of the OACPH.

The purposes are:

- to guide the professional judgment, decisions and actions of communicators in public health
- to inspire members to reflect and uphold the responsibility and obligations of public health
- to identify the ethical responsibilities and commitments of communicators in public health

THE STANDARDS

I. Competence

Communicators in public health have a variety of skills and expertise based on their individual backgrounds, training and education. These abilities may include, but are not limited to the areas of: editing, social marketing, social media, media relations, project management, strategic planning, presentations and training, graphic design, risk communications, and crisis communications. All OACPH members shall strive to maintain high standards of competence in their work as Communicators. They shall recognize the boundaries of their particular abilities and the limitations of their expertise. They shall provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by education, training or expertise.

II. Integrity

All OACPH members are honest, fair, ethical and respectful of others. In describing or reporting their qualifications or services, they shall not make statements that are false, misleading or deceptive. Members commit to authenticity and transparency to support effective communications and build trust in the organization. Members of the OACPH strive to be aware of their own belief systems, needs and limitations and the effect of these upon their work.

III. Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

All members of the OACPH shall respect the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people. Members shall be aware of cultural, individual and role differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, physical attributes, and socio-economic status. Members shall strive to improve health equity for all by reducing communication barriers where possible.

IV. Protection of Confidential Information

Members shall protect the confidences of employers and clients (past, present and future). Members shall only use or disclose confidential information from clients and employers - past, present and future - with their permission, by order of a court of law or if the information is needed to protect the welfare of others. Information gained through professional activities shall only be used with professional intent and not for personal gain.

V. Strive to Uphold Laws and Policies

Members shall protect private health information as governed by the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA) and in accordance with any confidentiality agreements with their employers and/or clients. Whenever possible, members shall obey and uphold the laws and professional policies governing their professional activities. When such laws and professional policies have been broken, for whatever reason, members shall work to promptly correct the situation.

VI. Commitment to Professional Knowledge

Members recognize that staying current in professional knowledge informs their professional practice. Members shall continuously improve their professional knowledge by learning and reflecting upon ethics, theory and current evidence. Members refine their professional practice through ongoing research and dialogue.

VII. Commitment to Public Health

Members shall support the development of communication policies and practices on a local, regional and provincial level which are consistent with the mission of public health, i.e. the prevention of illness and the protection and promotion of health. Members shall strive to improve health equity for all by reducing communication barriers where possible.

VIII. Commitment to a Positive Workplace

Members shall support and foster a respectful, cooperative and positive workplace environment with our professional colleagues through the sharing and knowledge exchange of effective internal communication practices.

IX. Providing Communications Advice

Members shall draw on evidence and best practice in communications, and refrain from personal bias and judgement, in providing communications advice to Medical Officers of Health, EDs/CEOs, Boards of Health and public health staff, and other public health communicators. All advice will promote the highest standards of transparency, honesty, accuracy, integrity and truth.

X. Representation of Communicators in Public Health

Members shall strive to represent the role of communicators in public health in a positive way. Members shall refer to the Executive of OACPH for any representation of the organization, including positions on advocacy activities.

XI. Collaboration and Partnerships

Members shall collaborate with others who share responsibilities for communications in public health, such as health promoters, knowledge translators and emergency management professionals, in order to engage in and support activities that affect the lives and health of Ontarians.