

Policy Name	Communication with the media		Policy Number	76-20.01	
Section Title	Communications and Disclosure of Information	Section Number	76-20	Former Policy No.	76-7.1
Approval Authority	Agency Director		Effective Date	5/22/2020	
Responsible Executive	Communications Director		Revised Date	5/4/2018	
Responsible Office	Director's Office		Last Reviewed	6/1/2021	
Responsible Reviewer	Barrett, Erin				

Purpose:

To ensure consistent messages and to provide support to boards and programs, the Department of Health Professions (DHP) media relations are centralized in Communications (inclusive of the Communications Director and an associate) as part of the Office of the Director.

Policy:

Press requests for public information are protected by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and are recognized as verbal FOIA's under §2.2-3704 of the Code of Virginia. As such, DHP is required to be both transparent and timely in response to requests for information not protected under law. FOIA requests must be answered verbally or in writing within five (5) working days though news media often have hourly or daily deadlines. Communications serves as the initial point of contact between the news media, health regulatory boards and DHP programs. Queries are routed by Communications to the appropriate board(s) or program(s). Similarly, media calls and email messages received by boards and programs are directed to Communications, which either prepares responses for review or assists content experts with replies.

Procedures:

1. All media requests for health regulatory boards and DHP programs are routed to Communications.
2. Communications determines which content experts are appropriate to respond to the request and collaborates with or convenes board(s) and program(s) for input as needed.
3. In the event neither the agency communications director nor the communications associate are available, the appropriate DHP spokesperson should determine whether to defer the request or provide a response. If a response is provided it will be the responsibility of the content expert to complete and submit an electronic copy of the Media Alert to Communications and a hard copy to the agency chief deputy director before close of business.

4. Communications will gather additional details from the reporter to inform the board and programmatic decision making process regarding the request. This includes:
- a. Determining whether the reporter is on deadline;
 - b. Seeking additional details about the information requested and whether it available on a board, program or the DHP website;
 - c. Identifying the story angle;
 - d. Referring a reporter to another source ;
 - e. Researching communications records in the event the reporter has contacted other boards or programs at DHP regarding the same story;
 - f. Reviewing background information on both the reporter making the request and their news organization;
 - g. Informing other state agency communications staff when a news story is likely to impact them;
 - h. Providing content in writing, via telephone or in person as appropriate; and
 - i. Escorting press at all times when they are on-site.
5. Communications will make recommendations regarding how best to manage media requests and may develop a draft written response for review by agency content experts before it is release.
6. Once there is agreement on an electronic response, it is sent by communications to the reporter with a blind carbon copy to the staff leadership of the board or program engaged.
7. Communications completes an internal document called a “DHP Media Alert” for review by content experts and submits at the conclusion of a press interview to the Director and Chief Deputy before the close of business that day or as soon as possible.
8. DHP’s Media Alert serves as a final record of information provided to the press and may be advanced by the Office of the Director to the Office of the Secretary and/or Governor.
9. When on-camera, live tape sync or other onsite interview is sought, Communications will manage the following aspects of preparation to include:
- a. Identify and reserve a room for the interview, preferably on the second floor in the Conference Center;

- b. Alert first floor guard station and DHP's third floor receptionist that a member of the press will be in the building;
- c. Meet the reporter and camera crew downstairs in the first floor lobby to escort them to the interview;
- d. Confirm with the reporter the topic to be discussed, parameters for the interview and manage press expectations;
- e. Assist DHP's content expert with preparations for the interview such as defining key message points to convey;
- f. Support DHP's content expert throughout the interview process and take notes;
- g. A member of the communications staff must accompany the reporter and camera crew at all times;
- h. At the conclusion of the interview communications staff will escort the news team to the lobby; and
- i. Communication will encourage camera crews that elect to tape or broadcast in the Perimeter Center Building to coordinate that activity with its Office.