

ANNE KLEIN COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Preserving the Mission - Realigning Mercy Health System Resources One in a Series of Award-Winning Solutions

The Challenge:

Preserve the integrity and reputation of the Mercy Health System (MHS) when it was forced to close Mercy Community Hospital.

Results:

- MHS was able to announce its plans to close this hospital without significant negative reaction among its employees.
- More than 70 percent of the hospital's nursing staff transferred to other MHS hospitals despite intense recruiting by competitors in a severe shortage market.
- Patient care was not compromised. The actual closure occurred without visible reaction from the community, except for the news media coverage specifically sought by MHS.
- The American Hospital Association summed up the campaign's effectiveness: "You are handling this very well. These transitions are never easy, but you are focused on people and mission . . . you'll make it work well."
- This program received a Pepperpot Award from the Philadelphia chapter of PRSA for Crisis Communications and a Pyramid Award for Crisis Communications from the PRSA/NJ chapter.

Background:

Mercy Health System, a major Catholic healthcare provider, needed to realign its services due to financial pressures from escalating costs and the chronic under-utilization of Mercy Community Hospital, Havertown, Pa. Operationally, MHS planned to transfer all inpatient resources from Mercy Community to nearby Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital, Darby, Pa. From a communications perspective, the goal was crisis prevention, enabling MHS to carry out its plans without unduly alarming employees, physicians, patients and local communities, or officials with oversight responsibilities.

The Campaign:

Anne Klein Communications Group had one month to develop an integrated, tailored, proactive campaign. AKCG envisioned three phases: (I) the announcement, (II) closing Community Hospital and (III) repositioning MHS. This case study focuses only on phases I & II. Research identified issues, clarified target audiences and provided insights into community relationships. The communications campaign focused on segmenting the target audiences and developing customized communications tools to reach each segment directly and personally. On announcement day, internal communications needs were met first, followed by outreach to key influentials, such as local pastors, with dissemination of information via the mass media last. The announcement went smoothly, enabling MHS to accelerate its planned closing of the hospital by one month, a considerable financial savings. For the actual closing, the communications campaign covered the same audiences, with greater emphasis on the mass media, ensuring no incidents, e.g., patients arriving after the emergency department closed, would mar the successful program.

To learn more about how Anne Klein Communications Group can help you effectively plan your communications surrounding sensitive issues, please call and ask for Anne Klein or Chris Lukach.