

# ANNE KLEIN COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

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## **Emergency Room Crisis is Quickly Resolved**

**One in a Series of Award-Winning Solutions**

### **The Challenge:**

To retain patient and community confidence in two of the South Jersey Health System's hospitals following the voluntary closure of their ERs, and inform the staff of developments and support its work.

### **Results:**

- Anne Klein Communication Group's communication efforts let the community know that the hospital had recognized and dealt with the cited problem long before the state of New Jersey's inspection. Ultimately, the hospitals received a clean bill of health from the New Jersey Division of Health and Senior Services.
- A survey of the emergency patients in the affected hospitals after the re-opening revealed 96 percent satisfaction with their treatment by the nurses in the ER, the highest in the state.
- Strong adherence to key messages developed by both AKCG and the hospital led to balanced media coverage and approval of the hospitals' action plans in the editorial pages.
- For this project, AKCG received a Pyramid Award from The New Jersey chapter of PRSA, a Peppercorn Award from the Philadelphia chapter of PRSA and a Jasper Award from the Jersey Shore PR & Advertising Association, all for Crisis Communications.

### **Background:**

The New Jersey Division of Health and Senior Services inspected the emergency room at one of the four South Jersey Health System (SJHS) hospitals. The inspection resulted from a report the hospital itself had filed with the N.J. State Board of Medical Examiners citing a physician for failing to respond to a page. The hospital had suspended the physician and taken corrective action months earlier.

Nine days after the inspection, and just five days before Christmas, the state, without warning, demanded that two of the four hospital emergency rooms close by 4 p.m. that day. The state also threatened to revoke Medicare and Medicaid funding unless a corrective action plan was submitted within five days and approved by the state.

Through its own quality assurance process, SJHS had identified the problem 10 months earlier and had taken corrective action. AKCG had four hours to prepare a response to the crisis and schedule a news conference.

### **The Campaign:**

AKCG immediately met with hospital administration and established key messages based on SJHS's mission statement. The firm scheduled a news briefing to ensure the media received timely, accurate information. EMTs were invited and accorded full media status at the briefing, so all of their questions received answers. The local town councils were briefed immediately after the hospital developed a corrective action plan, and the emergency rooms reopened several days later.

The communications strategy was to stay ahead of breaking news, releasing information as it became available. One-on-one media briefings to explain the corrective actions taken continued until the situation was resolved. AKCG provided presentation and media coaching to the vice president of medical affairs who served as chief spokesperson.

*To learn more about how Anne Klein Communications Group can prevent crisis in your organization or develop an effective plan for dealing with a crisis, please call and ask for Anne Klein or Chris Lukach.*