**Media and Communications tips for senior leaders – Kate Jarman Director of Corporate Affairs, Milton Keynes University Hospital Foundation Trust**

• Don’t underestimate the value of communications. Communications is a strategic function – it’s not just about tactical and operational delivery (as important as that is). What good communications teams do really well is take the temperature of the organisation. They are super networkers, they know the influencers amongst staff and stakeholders and they know what’s going to land well and what’s tone deaf. Involve them at the start of everything (rather than right at the end!)

• You need to do some training - how do interviews and work with journalists and public speaking. Being a good public speaker, and a good interviewee is a learned skill, not an art.

• Watch how people you admire communicate. But don’t emulate them. You need to find your voice. You set the tone for people in your team. The way you communicate is contagious. It’s a very powerful tool – don’t underestimate it. Pick up a couple of people you think are good communicators and study their verbal and non-verbal communication when they are relaxed and when they are under pressure.

• Whenever you do any kind of public speaking, or interview, get feedback. If it’s recorded, watch or listen back. It’s excruciating to do this, but it will really help you to improve. Most of us don’t realise how we use our hands when we speak, or that we smile and nod along with someone asking us questions, or that we talk too quickly or clear our throats every 30 seconds – you need to become a conscious communicator and manage your voice, face and body while you speak. It’s a muscle you need to keep stretching.

• Many people associate communications with managing the press, but it’s a wide professional discipline encompassing internal communications and engagement, social media, marketing, public information, engagement and consultation, political and stakeholder management (and etc). Much of this has a direct impact on the internal and external perceptions of you as a leader and what people think about the organisation you work in.

• Think about your comfort levels in the various ways you’ll be expected to communicate, and then decide your approach. Internal communications for example – what style and tone do you want to adopt as a leader? Are you relatively informal? What ways do you have of communicating regularly within your organisation that will suit your style and engender the culture you want in the function you lead? You can change your style and tone to suit a situation, but you need to have a core way of communicating and a ‘voice’ that people recognise as yours as that helps build trust.

• What’s your approach to social media? Love or hate it, it is where your staff and service users are going to be talking about your organisation. You need to make a decision about how you want to run your social media account (on whatever platform – Twitter being very popular in the wider health community). Social media is most engaging when people are authentic and you get a sense of who they are as well as what they do. But, everything you say and share is public, so you need to be comfortable with that – it will be seen by your staff, your service users, and journalists. If you use social media, make sure your communications team know and know your style and approach and make sure you are clear what you will do when people contact you with comments or complaints. Be prepared to have a bad experience, because you will have one – you have to take the bad with the good on social media. Please don’t be afraid to get help and advice if this happens – at the extreme end, it can be frightening and isolating.