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SUPERSEDES:		REASON FOR CHANGE:	
PREPARED BY: Communications Team		AUTHORISED BY: Minister of Health Permanent Secretary	

1.0 GENERAL

This communication policy provides a framework, to guide the communication process and activities within the Ministry of Health, as well as the interaction between the Ministry, its Agencies and Regional Health Authorities. It is critical to fostering and enhancing positive and effective relationships between the Ministry and its many constituent groups. The policy takes into account the Ministry’s overall mandate as the preeminent Government body responsible for the nation’s health, its strategic plan and priorities. Through this policy, the Ministry recognizes the importance of communication to the smooth functioning of its operations. It aims to create an organizational environment that facilitates a culture of integrity, openness, transparency and symmetrical communication, recognizing the Ministry’s responsibility and accountability to the Jamaican people.

2.0 SCOPE

The policy will guide both internal and external communication.

The Internal Communication component applies to all employees of the Ministry of Health, its Agencies and Regional Health Authorities. It provides guidelines for communication within the group, as well as maintaining feedback mechanisms, recognizing that the Ministry’s internal publics are critical to its effective functioning. As such, it will seek to foster the full involvement and commitment of staff to achieving the stated objectives and priorities of the Ministry/Government in Health and facilitate the free flow of information to ensure accuracy and timeliness for effective operations.

The External Communication component applies to the interaction between the Ministry and its various publics. It seeks to establish guidelines for publicising the work of the Ministry and its Regional Health Authorities to help establish a sound reputation for the public health sector and promote harmonious relations with its stakeholders and the general public. The policy will be implemented without impartiality.

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3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

This policy aims to:

- a) Provide a framework that facilitates the two-way flow of information both within and outside of the Ministry
- b) Promote the work of the Ministry, its Agencies and Regional Health Authorities, to engender greater understanding of the role and functions of each entity and the public health system in general.
- c) Facilitate and maintain feedback internally, as well as externally on issues germane to the nation's health
- d) Facilitate development, implementation and evaluation of communication processes, tools and programmes to enhance information flow between the Ministry, its agencies and authorities, using appropriate technology
- e) Ensure consistency of communication processes and standards across the public health system to facilitate dissemination of accurate information to clients, beneficiaries, communities and all other interested parties on a timely basis, using the appropriate and most effective media.
- f) Ensure that the Ministry's communication policy, processes and programmes, are strategically linked and consistent with those of successful organizations locally, regionally and internationally.

4.0 POLICY STATEMENTS

4.1 Internal Communication

- 4.1.1 The Ministry's **Top/Executive/Senior Management** shall define and facilitate the implementation of an effective process for communicating its policies, requirements, objectives and accomplishments throughout the Head Office, its agencies and Regional Health Authorities and facilitating feedback.
- 4.1.2 The Ministry's Senior Management will seek to fully engage staff in the operations/functioning of the Ministry by keeping them abreast of activities and relevant developments within and outside of the Ministry and encouraging feedback
- 4.1.3 Regional Health Authorities and agencies will facilitate information flow by advising and updating the Ministry and relevant personnel on activities, incidents, or information on issues

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4.1.3 Communication activities will include, as a minimum:

- a) Management led communication in work areas, at the unit, departmental and divisional levels to facilitate work flow.
- b) Team–briefings and other meetings to keep team members fully informed on project/programme activities and to facilitate performance
- c) Exchange of information through Regular/Quarterly Staff Meetings, Notice-boards, In-house publications, audio – visual and electronic media, such as E-mail and an Intranet
- d) Facilitating ongoing communication and feedback through Employee surveys and suggestion schemes.

4.2 External Communication

4.2.1 Client/Patient/Stakeholder Communication

The Ministry’s goal/focus is on delivering high quality customer service to all its stakeholders. As part of this process it will develop and implement effective arrangements/channels, including Patient/Client/Citizens’ Charters for communicating with its clients and other stakeholders, a Complaints Mechanism and other in relation to standards for health care delivery:

- (a) Health information, services and facilities for both Primary and Secondary Health Care,
 - a) Tenders and contracts, including amendments
 - c) Enquiries and Customer feedback

4.2.1.1 Service delivery personnel, especially those with direct client contact, shall have adequate knowledge, information and the necessary communication skills, to facilitate appropriate interaction with various stakeholder groups and organizations to provide prompt and efficient service.

4.2.2 Use of Client Information

The Ministry shall hold all customer information in strictest confidence and ensure prudent use of such information, ensuring :

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- a) Confidentiality and security of customer data and material provided in the research process.
- b) Observance of standards and ethical practices in the use and acquisition of research information.
- c) That information in the Health database, especially as it relates to customer requirements and complaints are incorporated in planning and implementation to develop new projects and programmes.

4.2.3 Client Complaints

The Ministry will establish a system for effectively handling complains from clients/patients/stakeholders to enhance its service delivery and responsiveness to the public.

- a) Information on how and where to complain will be publicised to customers/clients/patients and other interested parties in written and on-line formats.
- b) The complaints handling process shall be clearly outlined and easily accessible to all persons.
- c) A function will be established to receive complaints and each complaint will be acknowledged to the complainant within 5 days. Issues will be addressed promptly **in accordance with their urgency**. Complainants will be treated courteously and kept informed of the progress of their complaint through the complaints handling process.
- d) Each complaint will be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner through the complaints handling process, which shall include:
 - i) Monthly monitoring of resolved complaints to be conducted. Randomly selected complainants to be surveyed regarding the level of objectivity received in handling their complaint.
 - ii) Objectivity for personnel
Persons complained against shall be:
 - informed immediately and completely on any complaint about their performance.
 - given opportunity to explain circumstances and allow appropriate support
 - kept informed of the progress of the investigation and the result

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- e) Personally identifiable information concerning a complaint should be available only where needed and only for the purposes of addressing the complaint. The information shall be actively protected from disclosure unless the customer or complainant expressly consents to its disclosure.
- f) All personnel who interact with customers will be trained in customer service and the handling of complaints.
- g) Information provided to complainant regarding decisions taken should be given in general terms.
- h) The Ministry's response options will include but are not limited to:
 - i) Refunds
 - ii) Replacement
 - iii) Repair/rework
 - iv) Substitutes
 - v) Technical Assistance
 - vi) Information
 - vii) Referral
 - viii) Financial assistance??
 - ix) Other assistance
 - x) Compensation
 - xi) Apology
 - xii) Goodwill gift or token
- i) Monitoring of data is important to provide an indicator of the effectiveness of the complaints handling process. Monitoring data will include the number of:
 - i) Complaints received
 - ii) Complaints resolved
 - iii) Complaints incorrectly prioritized
 - iv) Complaints acknowledged after agreed time
 - v) Complaints resolved after agreed time
 - vi) Complaints referred to external methods of resolution
 - vii) Repeat complaints or recurrent problems that have been complained about
 - viii) Improvements in procedures.

4.2.4 Government Communication

As a part of the Government machinery The Ministry of Health is

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committed to keeping the Government, through the Cabinet, fully informed of its activities and performance on a timely basis. In this regard particular attention will be paid to the practice of good corporate governance, and participation in the activities of the Government Communicators Group: As part of this commitment the Ministry will

- a) Prepare and present Reports for Budget and other debates
- b) Provide annual reports and audited financial statements for the Ministry and its agencies and Regional Health Authorities within six months of the end of the financial year.
- c) Communicate on a regular basis with all related public sector organizations and the Local Government machinery.

4.2.5 Media Communication

4.2.5.1 Ministry officers who are assigned media relations' responsibilities shall explore opportunities to build relationships of co-operation and mutual respect between the Ministry and the media on an impartial basis. The Ministry's Communicators shall use a variety of media and approaches to reach various target groups to facilitate public information and health promotion.

4.2.5.2 Communicators shall develop, explore and utilise the formal communication mechanisms and tools that exist in the media to get the Ministry's message out and enhance public understanding

4.2.6 Other Stakeholders' Communication

Communicate with all stakeholders within the health sector on issues and activities relevant to their areas, on a timely basis.

4.2.7 Visual Identity System

4.2.7.1 The Ministry will continue to use the Coat of Arms as its logo, as it is the Official symbol of Government and is recognized locally and internationally. The use of the logo shall be controlled and it shall be displayed on signs, buildings, vehicles and other properties belonging to the Ministry.

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4.2.7.2 The relationship of RHAs and Agencies to the Ministry shall be incorporated on Letterheads and in all advertising and marketing messages by these organizations, as far as possible.

4.3 Electronic Communication

The Ministry recognizes the convergence of technologies based on voice, video, and data networks and is therefore establishing a framework for electronic communications. This will ensure that it utilizes all communication media in promoting its work, as well as sharing information and knowledge on health and safety issues.

4.4 Legal and Regulatory Requirements

The Ministry shall satisfy the requirements of all applicable legislation including, but not restricted to:

- a) The Company's Act
- b) The Official Secrets' Act
- c) The Copyright Act
- d) The Access to Information Act 2002
- e) Fair Trading

Staff Orders for the Public Service 2004

- g) The Government's Code of Consultation
- h) Procedures Manual Health Records Services 2000

4.4.1 All information of a "sensitive" nature that may require legal opinion should be vetted by the legal department.

4.4.2 The Information and Documentation Services shall be responsible for the records of the organisation, the speedy and efficient dissemination of information, as well as the easy retrieval of information.

4.4.3 All requests for information under the ATI should be forwarded to the Responsible Officer- Director, Information and Documentation Access Services.

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5.0 RESPONSIBILITY

- 5.1 The Minister, guided by Cabinet has overall responsibility for the Ministry's internal and external communication process and for the appointment of spokespersons.
- 5.2 The Permanent Secretary has responsibility for ensuring implementation of the communication policy within the Ministry, RHAs and agencies and encouraging a climate that fosters communication between the Ministry and the wider community.
- 5.3 The Senior Management Team is responsible for facilitating and maintaining open communication and feedback as well as communicating the vision and focus of the divisions to staff, to satisfy the strategic intent of the Ministry.
- 5.4 The Public Relations Department is responsible for developing and implementing a Corporate Communication Programme that reflects the Ministry's strategic plan and priorities. The department will also monitor and evaluate the communication processes within the Ministry, RHAs and agencies, with a view to facilitating two way communication
- 5.5 All Managers are responsible for maintaining open communication with staff, providing information on relevant decisions and facilitating feedback.
- 5.6 The Human Resource Department is responsible for providing information in relation to employee well-being and development.
- 5.7 The Communication Committee facilitates communication by ensuring the two-way flow of information throughout health system .
- 5.8 Programme/Area Managers are responsible for providing information on activities in their areas/portfolios to Senior Management, Public Relations, other relevant officers and the media when called upon to do so.
- 5.9 RHAs, Primary and Secondary Care institutions/facilities are responsible for advising the Ministry and the Public Relations Department, as a matter of urgency all critical issues which may arise in the process of delivery health care to clients, particularly if the matter has received public attention
- 5.9 All employees of the Ministry, and the RHAs are required to adhere to the communication policy and provide information to co-workers, supervisors and customers in a timely manner to facilitate the communication process and the proper functioning of the organization..

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- 5.10 Persons employed to the Ministry have a responsibility to represent the Ministry, to the best of their ability, in a positive light. “Regardless of personal opinion” therefore, the Ministry’s views should be ascertained and stated positively.

6.0 GUIDELINES

All communication should be representative of the Ministry of Health and should conform to its quality standards.

6.1 Confidentiality

- 6.1.1 The confidentiality of information received in the course of duty should be respected and not be divulged. Information given in the course of duty should be true, fair, never designed to mislead and should never be used for personal gain.

6.1.2 Tone and Use of Language

Appropriate language and tone should be used at all times. The message should be conveyed clearly, courteously and succinctly. When consulting colleagues the issues for discussion should be clearly outlined.

6.1.3 Handling of Documents

All original correspondence shall be sent to the registry and should not be defaced in anyway except to record receipt.

6.1.4 Presentations

It is the responsibility of all staff, who are not using professionals (administrative and secretarial staff) for production of their presentation material, to ensure that they are trained in basic standards of presentation skills, in written form and the use of email.

6.1.5 Media

All incoming media queries shall be referred to the Public Relations Department. The department will identify appropriate spokespersons for interviews and discussion programmes, or coordinate an appropriate response to queries

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6.2 Internal Communication

In order to ensure efficient and effective Internal Communication the following steps will be taken:

- 6.2.1 The Minister and Permanent Secretary will approve the communication policy, strategies, action plans, and commit to the communication process by providing adequate resources to enable implementation.
- 6.2.2 The Permanent Secretary will regularly communicate the strategic direction of the Ministry, its policies, requirements, objectives, accomplishments, projects, and priorities to all staff.
- 6.2.3 The Permanent Secretary, the Chief Medical Officer or their designate shall approve information on critical issues for release to the media.
- 6.2.4 The Senior Management team shall be actively involved in the development and maintenance of an effective communication system, both internally and externally, and especially in providing timely, accurate information for the media, in order to achieve the Ministry's objectives.
- 6.2.5 Managers at all levels shall maintain open communication with their staff by:
 - a) Providing feedback from Management meetings to update staff on new policies, projects and programmes.
 - b) Creating an environment that promotes free expression of employees' needs, expectations and opinions
 - c) Allowing for feedback from staff, including information gleaned in the public domain on projects, programmes and any health related issues, which may affect the Ministry's operations/image/reputation.
 - d) Communicating with employees about their job requirements, performance, well-being, development, safety and health policies/programmes,
 - e) Communicating customer complaints and satisfaction
 - f) Providing any other information considered relevant to the proper functioning of the organisation/division/department

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6.2.6 The Human Resource Development Department will help to create a work environment, which promotes job satisfaction, staff development and performance by:

- a) Providing information in relation to employee well-being and development such as:
 - i) Personnel policies, programmes and industrial relations regulations
 - ii) Compensation and benefits
 - iii) Training, manpower and succession plans
 - iv) Changes in HR related policies
 - v) Vacancies, new recruits, staff promotions

6.2.7 The Health Communication Committee (HCC) will use communication to help create a climate of well informed workers, conducive to high performance and motivation by:

- a) Ensuring that staff at all levels and locations are informed and have an opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them
- b) Facilitating the sharing of information and best practices and the recognition of staff achievement
- c) Monitoring the organisational climate and providing feedback to the Senior Management team to enhance the communication process.

6.2.8 The Department responsible for communication must ensure that the Communication process within the Ministry is continually monitored and improved by:

- a) Producing the communication policy, determining objectives and developing strategies for its implementation and updating from time to time
- b) Developing an annual communication plan that includes internal and external communication, as a component of achieving the Ministry's Strategic Objectives.
- c) Measuring the results of the communication processes against the original objectives and taking steps to remedy shortfalls.

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6.2.9 All Employees are responsible for information related to their specific areas and must become actively involved in providing accurate and timely information to co-workers and supervisors by:

- a) Participating in continual dialogue among themselves and with their supervisors in the interest of the Ministry, and by actively providing suggestions that will enhance the operations of the Ministry.

6.3 External Communication

To ensure efficient and effective External Communication the following steps will be taken:

6.3.1 The Minister shall approve the communication policy, strategies, action plans, and commit to the communication process by providing adequate resources for implementing external programmes.

6.3.2 The Minister and Permanent Secretary shall agree on the spokespersons for each Division/Area, although for certain critical issues, authority to release information or to speak on behalf of the Ministry, must be received from the Minister or Permanent Secretary. It is accepted however, that Senior Directors, Regional and Programme Directors are the responsible spokespersons for their respective areas.

6.3.4 The PS shall communicate the Ministry's goals, priorities and programmes to all its stakeholders and the general public regularly.

6.3.5 The Senior Management Team shall provide support by:

- a) Ensuring understanding of stakeholders' needs and expectations and making appropriate responses, by encouraging open communication and feedback from stakeholders.
- b) Helping to establish a sound reputation for the Ministry.
- c) Ensuring that ethical practices are observed and maintained as professionals and in all communication.

6.3.6 The Public Relations Manager will have responsibility for:

- a) Preparing a plan to deal with crisis matters in collaboration with the relevant professional groups, for eg. The Director

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Disaster Management and Emergency Services, and other Senior Directors, Regional Health Authorities and agencies and communicating it to all relevant personnel.

6.3.7 Senior Managers shall promote the Ministry through:

- a) Accepting invitations to speak on work relevant to the Ministry and their areas of responsibility, its mandate in accordance with the Personnel Policy.
- b) Disseminating information in collaboration with Public Relations on the work of the Ministry, especially in programme areas to facilitate the process of education of various target groups, communities and the general public.

6.3.8 An Officer shall be assigned responsibility for:

- a) Receiving all queries/complaints/concerns of a general nature.
- b) Ensuring that the queries/complaints/concerns are directed to the appropriate officer, and follow-up to ensure that all matters are satisfactorily dealt with.
- d) Submitting monthly reports to the Permanent Secretary and Senior Management on (b) above.

6.3.9 The Department responsible for communication shall provide information using various communication tools and channels to:

- a) Publicize events; report organizational changes and performance.
- b) Promote the work and operations of the Ministry through the media and other channels
- c) To implement the Communication Policy throughout the Ministry, its Agencies and RHAs
- d) Develop and implement the communication programme and budget and evaluate its effectiveness.
- e) Facilitate contact with or access to the media and develop appropriate strategies and responses in collaboration with the functional areas, to disseminate prompt, accurate and relevant information

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- f) Develop a programme to enhance relations with stakeholders in the health sector and other strategic areas.
- g) Liaise with HR to implement the internal communication plan, eg. Meetings and orientation and ensure that designated officers are trained to interact with the media, handle interviews and take on speaking engagements.
- h) Develop standards for the use of the Ministry's logo and other graphic material

6.3.10 Designated Officers shall be responsible for disseminating information on their functional areas and within their sphere of authority. They will:

- a) Provide all relevant information on their functional area for release to the media in a timely fashion.
- b) Speak on specific/portfolio issues when required to do so.

6.4 All employees will adhere to the criteria set out for media communication in order to ensure that the Ministry speaks with one voice and delivers a cohesive, well balanced message to the media, on a timely basis.

7.0 REFERENCES

- 7.1 Communication Process Diagram
- 7.2 Communication Procedures
- 7.3 Electronic Communication Policy
- 7.4 Personnel Policies and Procedures
- 7.5 Crisis Communication Plan