

# HOW TO HANDLE THE MEDIA

PETE BURDON discusses why retirement villages and aged care facilities should be prepared with a media policy.

What would happen if a TV reporter arrived at your village or facility and started asking sensitive questions of staff with the camera rolling? Would they know what to do?

This is one reason why you need a media policy. This does not have to be a huge document that sits in a bookcase gathering dust. But it does need to clearly outline what all staff should do in all potential media scenarios.

For example, if there is a serious allegation made against a staff member, what is the policy? This can lead to all sorts of media scrutiny. Reporters may approach carers, the gardener, and anyone else who may give them an interesting comment.

It only takes one off-the-cuff comment to turn a relatively minor issue into a full-blown crisis. It must be made clear to all staff how they must deal with scenarios like this.

The staff members most at risk of this are receptionists because they are on the front line.

Let's take another scenario. A media crew arrive in the reception area and request an interview with the manager about a complaint from a resident. Whatever the receptionist says may become the TV story, so it's vital that he or she knows exactly what to do and say. This must be clearly laid out in the media policy.

There must be someone specifically designated in the policy to act as a media liaison person and someone to fulfil the role of media spokesperson.

The liaison person plays an important role in dealing with all enquiries from journalists and contacting them when good news stories arise that may interest them. This is a wonderful way to grow reputations and profiles. All media calls requesting information or interviews should be directed straight to this person. He or she will liaise closely with the spokesperson.

The spokesperson is a separate role. This is the person who fronts for the media interviews and is usually the job of the owner or manager. Sometimes this role and the media liaison officer are played by the same person.

The roles of media liaison officer and spokesperson are vital. But as we've seen, it's important that every staff member knows what to do and say around media. In other words, it must be a team effort. For example, if a staff member is approached about a sensitive issue, the policy should outline that the only reply should be "you'll have to speak to X about that".

Every village and facility will have its own exceptions to these rules. It's vital that they are spelt out to all staff in the media policy. This will prevent a disaster if you suddenly find yourself in the middle of a crisis. But it must be in place before it's needed.

Often a media training course is a good idea for spokespeople, as media interviews are like no other conversations and can trip up even the best communicators. A course for media liaison officers is also beneficial for those unaware of how the media works and what journalists want. 🌟

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