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From: Jarrard Inc.
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Engagement: Best Practices: Communicating Effectively Related to COVID-19

We appreciate the opportunity to share trends and best practices from our work helping healthcare providers across the country navigate the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Several recommendations resulting from these findings are integrated in the HealthPRO® Heritage comprehensive COVID-19 communications plan and Partner Toolkit, while others are unique to the current state of the evolving pandemic. The intent of this memo is to act as a resource for you and your partner companies.

Trends We're Seeing Unfold

- » **Care providers across the country are rapidly implementing operational changes.** As COVID-19 continues to spread, hospitals, health systems and non-acute care providers are making operational changes to protect patients and their employees. Some of the major trends we're seeing include:
 - Many organizations are limiting patient visitors and guests for regularly scheduled appointments.
 - This is especially true among skilled nursing facilities and senior living centers. Most have suspended visitor policies, outside of end-of-life scenarios in which case one visitor can be seen by patients during each visit.
 - Patients, visitors and guests are receiving different types of screening to identify and isolate potential COVID-19 cases.
 - Elective, non-necessary procedures are being rescheduled.
 - Providers are leveraging telehealth, virtual health and other mechanisms to ensure patients preserve access to their provider and receive the care they need while reducing their chances of exposure to the virus.
 - Specialty care facilities are encouraging patients to seek urgent care needs there, depending on the purpose, over visiting emergency rooms.
 - Healthcare providers are quarantining employees that have been exposed to the virus for at least a 14-day period.

This shift toward operational response is requiring increased communications with employees, patients and their families. Many providers are identifying their most likely scenarios related to COVID-19 and developing communications plans for each scenario.

- » **Media coverage is collectively focused on the unpreparedness of healthcare providers to successfully handle this pandemic.** As experts encourage the public to help “bend the curve” with respect to spreading COVID-19, nearly all media outlets are reporting that our country’s healthcare system is being overwhelmed, and providers could eventually be in a situation where they would have to turn away patients in need of care.

This represents a unique challenge for all healthcare providers. While they want to project confidence about their ability to address the virus, they also must be cautious about what they will have the capacity to do if the virus infects a greater portion of the country.

- » **Given this, both the general public and healthcare workers are increasingly confused and scared.** Constant media coverage on providers’ lack of preparedness, coupled with the continuing the spread of the virus, is heightening fears and anxiety. We see many healthcare providers working aggressively to alleviate fear and anxiety by:
 - Clearly communicating their policies and procedures in the moment as they change.
 - Using a tone that’s reassuring, supportive and provides very clear direction for employees, patients, families and leadership.
 - Separating fear from fact and presenting action-oriented tips for both employees and patients. This includes ensuring stakeholders have access to the most reliable sources of information, such as the CDC and state health departments.
- » **Many healthcare providers are recognizing the current and potential psychological impact on their employees.** Providers are thinking strategically about how to prepare for the long term, be supportive to employees and provide the additional resources needed for them.
- » **COVID-19 is here to stay, and so are the opportunities to showcase innovation.** Healthcare providers have started to take a long-term view of the virus, and they will be addressing the issue of COVID-19 for months – not weeks. National, regional and local media are not only covering the issue nonstop, but

they are also developing new web series, podcasts and other outlets to discuss the virus' impact on our nation's healthcare delivery system, in addition to a deeper look into its ability to handle future pandemics.

Healthcare providers and communicators will be talking about COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. Those organizations that are more forward-looking are also beginning to showcase their unique approaches to care (telehealth, home health, etc.) as an opportunity to illustrate their mission and innovative nature. Many are "in their moment" with the prime time for new services to shine.

- » **The next cycle of media coverage is starting to emerge, and the focus is on human stories.** We've seen the news coverage evolve from the novelty, onset and spread of the virus to human interest stories on the actual patients and families impacted, as well as both the strengths and limitations providers are facing as they deliver care. Now is the time for healthcare leaders and communicators to think about how they want to influence the next wave of media coverage, highlight the amazing role their employees and physicians are playing on the frontlines of care and capture the heroic stories that only healthcare providers can claim.

Best Practices to Consider

- » **Remember your employees are your most valuable resource and most important audience.** Providers and caregivers are a unique, strong and committed group. However, COVID-19 will undoubtedly weigh on their minds and add tremendous stress to an already stressful professional. During times of great challenge, it is essential to consider the needs of your employees to ensure that they can provide the care that HealthPRO® Heritage and our partner organizations are known for and that they feel safe doing so. Some actionable means of doing so include:
 - Providing your team with regular and ongoing updates about what your organization is doing to protect them and to care for patients.
 - When possible, talking to your team 1:1 and in small groups.
 - Asking team members how they are doing and taking action to address their needs and concerns.

We have also shared a separate list of additional resources that address this need.

- » **Proactively position your team as experts.** For skilled nursing and senior living facilities, in particular, containing an infectious disease is a common crisis that teams face. Providers in these organizations and across the healthcare

continuum have a responsibility to help their patients and communities separate fear from fact. Showing that you understand these protocols and execute them regularly instills confidence and shows that some of the people most vulnerable for contracting COVID-19 are in highly capable hands.

This expertise can be elevated by providing regular updates to your team and by partnering with local media to be subject matter experts. Many organizations are also speaking directly to patients by posting information on their website and social media channels and sharing information via text message and patient portals.

- » **Think about, and plan for, what is coming next.** To create certainty for the future, now is the time to think about additional operational changes your organization could make and how you will communicate those changes. Think about what you will say if you must suspend operations temporarily, or if your organization becomes overwhelmed and you cannot care for all patients who are in need. Having those conversations now will allow you to preserve your reputation in the future.

- » **Tone matters: remain humble and human.** Through all this work, remember that your team and your patients are uncertain and likely scared. Be empathetic with communications and work to match the message with the right messenger.

Message Themes for Additional Communications

The message themes below have been drafted to help leaders communicate COVID-19 information to all audiences. These themes were designed to create a sense of order and confidence.

- » **[HealthPRO® Heritage Partner] is deeply committed to protecting our patients and employees from the COVID-19 virus, and we are working hard to do so.**
 - First and foremost, we are asking all patients and team members who are not feeling well to stay home and seek medical care if they have COVID-19 symptoms.
 - We have planned for multiple COVID-19 related scenarios and have outlined communications processes and cascades that address each of them in our COVID-19 communications plan.
 - The plan addresses audiences across the organization, both internal and external, as well as the suggested timeline for each scenario.

- This plan will serve as a living reference for our organization and partners if and when cases of COVID-19 impact our organization and facilities.
- » **[HealthPRO® Heritage Partner] is approaching this situation with the same clinical excellence and compassionate care for which we are known.**
 - HealthPRO® Heritage will work tirelessly to ensure our patients receive the appropriate care, visitor policies protect our patients and residents and our environments stay safe and healthy during the viral outbreak.
- » **We are committed to ongoing communications and ensuring that our employees have the information and resources they need to provide excellent care during this challenging time.**
 - We have established several avenues for both internal and external communications, and our teams remain in regular communication. Our COVID-19 communications plan outlines these specifics in more granular detail and will be adhered to for the duration of the pandemic.
 - Our leadership team, clinical staff and all other team members have been in constant adherence of CDC guidelines and local recommendations. We have evolved our in-house protocols as the pandemic continues and will continue to do so.
- » **Our team will continue monitoring developments and providing ongoing updates.**
 - As the COVID-19 virus and response continues to develop, our team will continue to adhere to the guidance of national leadership, as well as our local and state health departments. We will act responsibly and share updates with our team and patients in the months ahead.

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Please note: In the interest of supporting our partners and the industry as a whole, HealthPRO Heritage offers this resource to help strengthen your preparedness efforts. Information and resources contained herein does not constitute formal legal advice and should be customized to align with each individual community's policies, procedures and unique circumstances.