National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Communications Directorate progress report

Summary of activity

This report provides an update on key issues and developments in the Communications Directorate in the period January - February 2021. Communication and planning for the launch of the new 5-year strategy and several marketing initiative were among the key areas of work during this period.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

With the number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals increasing in January/February, we reviewed our plans to publicise new guidance and other initiatives on a case-by-case basis. Our aim was to be sensitive to the pressures on the system while facilitating the return to more normal levels of non-COVID services.

We have been working with colleagues in the Centre for Guidelines to develop lines to take and key messages for guidance users about the forthcoming publication of the diagnosis and management of COVID-19 guideline using the MAGICApp platform.

Marketing communications

We developed key messages, a draft marketing communications strategy and initial action plan to support NICE's efforts to establish its role within the digital health sector, and to begin to demonstrate progress and impact.

We supported the AI Multi Agency Advice Service (a collaboration between NICE, the MHRA, the HRA and CQC that will support the development and adoption of artificial intelligence-driven technologies in the health and care system) with the development of key messages, a stakeholder engagement strategy and communications planning to formally announce the project.

A new animation summarising NICE International’s purpose and service offering was produced in January to support their presentation at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health on 22 January. Work also commenced on refreshing the NICE International web page, with a view to improving user experience and search engine optimisation. The new animation will also feature on the revised NICE International web page and within marketing communications campaigns. In February, a research agency was appointed to gain audience insight that will be used to inform development of NICE International's business strategy, and marketing strategy.

5-year strategy launch

During the reporting period, the Communications Directorate has initiated a multi-channel campaign to promote the 19 April launch of our new 5-year strategy, and to start to embed it with our audiences. The campaign to drive registrations for the launch event included using organic social media posts, newsletter articles, direct email invitations to key stakeholders and placing articles in system partners' bulletins.

We procured the services of a media agency to develop a paid digital marketing campaign to further increase registrations for the launch event, and to raise awareness of the strategy and what it means for our audiences post-launch. The paid campaign will run from early April to mid-May. Channel planning is currently underway.

Lord Bethell is scheduled to open the launch event and freelance journalist Richard Vize will host/facilitate the event. More than 1,200 delegates have registered to date, including delegates from 30 countries outside the UK. The delegate breakdown is as follows:

To support the strategy launch we have:

* + Secured a special session of the All Party Parliamentary Health Group (APHG) on 28 April at which the chairman and chief executive will present and explain the strategy to a select group of MPs, peers and patient group representatives.
  + Worked with colleagues in DIT on designs and content for a refreshed NICE website homepage and strategy landing page and subpages - both of which will go live on 19 April, to coincide with the strategy publishing.

Commenced delivery of strategic internal communications to staff, focusing on strategy engagement alongside embedding our values and behaviours.

Stakeholder communications

Communications support has continued to be given to the NICE methods and processes review, including engaging with stakeholders to promote consultations and related webinars, issuing a press release and web [news story](https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/nice-s-processes-of-technology-evaluation-presenting-a-case-for-change) for the latest consultation, and providing strategic communications advice to support and plan next steps.

We supported and advised on NICE’s response to the CQC’s strategy consultation. We also tracked the progress of the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill as it was signed into law and advised on what it means for NICE.

We engaged with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on First Do No Harm in connection with an online discussion they were holding. We also advised on discussions between Liz Twist MP and members of CHTE following NICE’s issuing of draft guidance on sapropterin for children.

We engaged with a wide range of key stakeholders (including National Health Executive, other NHS organisations, royal colleges and relevant specialist institutes and societies) who have helped promote NICE's recent quality standard on abortion care and the latest impact report on cardiovascular disease through their own channels.

Enquiries

We responded to 1163 enquiries during this period. 90% were answered within 18 days. Additionally, we responded to 16 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 12 MP letters, 13 parliamentary questions and 1 coroner’s report. We also provided contributions to DHSC for 3 further coroner’s reports.

Notable enquiry topics in this reporting period included:

* + Coroner’s report raising concerns as to whether there is sufficient guidance relating to the monitoring of mothers and babies in the immediate time following discharge from hospital after birth, and the assessment of babies when the mother is admitted to hospital within 28 days of birth (especially when diagnosed with infection and at high risk of developing sepsis). To be considered by developers in the ongoing updates of our guidance on postnatal care up to 8 weeks after birth (CG37) and neonatal infection: antibiotics for prevention and treatment (CG149).

Continued interest in aspects of COVID-19, in particular vitamin D for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19 and the rapid guideline on the long-term effects of COVID-19.

Media

Sentiment percentages for media coverage in January and February were as follows: Positive 85%; Neutral 9%; Negative 6%

The publication of the draft guidance on sapropterin for treating phenylketonuria gained widespread national and trade media coverage, a particular focus of which was the recommendation that the treatment should not be offered to adults 18 years and older in the NHS. This draft continues to attract significant social media activity, which we are monitoring and responding to where appropriate.

In February, we issued a press release and published a [news story](https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/thousands-of-breast-cancer-patients-to-have-routine-access-to-nice-approved-drug-combination) on NICE’s positive recommendation for ribociclib for breast cancer. This received widespread coverage, including articles in The Times, Independent, [Daily Mail](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9305503/Women-incurable-breast-cancer-benefit-new-drug-extend-life-eight-months.html), [Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/26/life-extending-drug-ribociclib-incurable-breast-cancer-approved-for-nhs), [GM Journal](https://www.gmjournal.co.uk/new-advanced-breast-cancer-drug-combination-recommended-by-nice), [National Health Executive](https://www.nationalhealthexecutive.com/articles/breast-cancer-drug-ribociclib-NHS), [PharmaField](https://pharmafield.co.uk/pharma_news/nice-recommendation-for-novartis-kisqali-in-advanced-breast-cancer/), [PharmaPhorum](https://pharmaphorum.com/news/nice-okays-regular-nhs-funding-for-novartis-breast-cancer-drug-kisqali/), [PharmaFile](http://www.pharmafile.com/news/571501/nice-recommends-novartis-ribociclib-combination-fulvestrant-breast-cancer), [PharmaTimes](http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/nice_recommends_routine_funding_for_novartis_kisqali_1364227) and [Pharmacy In Focus](https://www.pharmacyinfocus.co.uk/positive-decision-by-nice-good-news-for-breast-cancer-patients/).

Audience insights

Work on the next biennial reputation research (scheduled for Q2 2021) continues, including consideration of key questions to measure progress against the 5-year strategy ambitions.

As part of our continued support for the integrated content project, a programme of user research has been completed including user research sessions to validate the user journey and user needs; and further fieldwork with GPs and practice nurses to support content development and testing.

Website content

We continue to support the business through the delivery of new and/or redesigned web content. Key pieces of work over the period include; [process consultation for health technology evaluation](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/nice-guidance/reviewing-our-process-for-health-technology-evaluation--consultation); a redesigned [events page](https://www.nice.org.uk/news/events) to provide a more visual approach in line with our [5-year strategy launch event](https://www.nice.org.uk/news/events/5-year-strategy-virtual-event-launch), a collaboration with Social Care Wales to provide Welsh translations of our ‘[Recognising and preventing delirium](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quick-guides/recognising-and-preventing-delirium)’ and ‘[Recognising and responding to domestic violence and abuse](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quick-guides/recognising-and-responding-to-domestic-violence-and-abuse)’ social care quick guides; a redesigned [jobs page](https://www.nice.org.uk/get-involved/jobs) to support users in finding and applying for vacancies; an accessible, HTML version of the [CVD management impact report](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/into-practice/measuring-the-use-of-nice-guidance/impact-of-our-guidance/nice-impact-cardiovascular-disease-management).

Risks

A risk remains that the Communications Directorate will not be able to fully support the implementation of the 5-year strategic plan because of limited resources. However, we are addressing this risk with changes to the way we work across the directorate and recruiting a senior post in Q1 of 2021-22.

There is an ongoing risk that productivity and staff morale are adversely affected by the current wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of factors are helping to mitigate this risk including the government's roadmap for lifting lockdown and reopening of schools. We also paused some non-essential comms activities during this period.

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