

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) recognizes that health care is a public service, accountable to the province and the residents of BC, and as such, that the public and media have a right to information about certain issues involving VIHA, its patients/residents/clients and staff. VIHA encourages open and timely communication with the media as a means to build public confidence in the health care system and promote VIHA's reputation and integrity.

With this in mind, VIHA's guiding philosophies towards media relations are to:

- Provide timely responses to media inquiries.
- Provide factual information in an honest and forthright manner while ensuring patient confidentiality and safety are protected as required by law and VIHA policy.
- Seek proactive and positive media attention when opportunities arise.

Media relations is a function of VIHA's Communications Department. All media inquiries and requests for interviews about VIHA patients/residents/clients, services, staff, facilities or administration must be made through VIHA Communications. This includes interviews that are initiated by a patient or staff member.

GUIDELINES

1. Access to VIHA Facilities and Property:

- All requests for media access to VIHA facilities or exterior properties ("grounds") must be coordinated through, and approved by, VIHA Communications. With prior approval from Communications, media will be permitted on VIHA grounds without restriction.
- In exceptional circumstances, access to VIHA grounds may be restricted.
- Media activities cannot violate the rights to privacy of VIHA patients/residents/clients or staff, obstruct access to any facility or cause a disturbance.
- With prior approval by Communications and key individuals responsible for the affected area, media may be permitted inside VIHA facilities with the escort of a Communications representative, or designate.
- Certain areas of the hospital (e.g., in-patient, ICU, ORs), and some facilities (e.g., extended care facilities) are generally not accessible to media.

2. Interviews, Photographs, Videotaping:

- All media requests for interviews, photographs or video about VIHA patients/residents/clients, services, staff, facilities or administration must be made through VIHA Communications.
- If a patient/family/guardian initiates a media contact or interview on VIHA property, they must complete and sign the media consent form prior to being interviewed, photographed or videotaped. Media must contact VIHA Communications prior to accessing VIHA property to interview patients/residents/clients.
- A VIHA Communications representative or designate will be present during any interview with a patient/resident/client inside a VIHA facility, except by specific prior arrangement.

3. Personal Information about specific patients/residents/clients or staff:

- In accordance with VIHA's confidentiality policy and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA), details containing personal information about an individual patient/resident/client or staff member can be released to the media ONLY with the consent of the patient/resident/client/staff or if incapable, the legal representative of that person, or as authorized by law.
- Information confirming a patient is currently admitted to a VIHA facility may be provided to media without patient consent, unless the patient has been designated as a 'no information patient.' Media must have the full name (first and last) of the patient before admittance to a facility can be confirmed.
- Media requests for "no information" patients are responded to by indicating "I have no information to provide on that individual."
- A 'no information patient' means the patient, a family member, guardian, police or other authority has requested that no information be released about the person, including whether they are even receiving care at a VIHA facility.
- Patient/resident/client consent is not required to give a one-word ("good/stable/serious/critical") condition report, unless the patient is identified as a 'no information patient.' The following terminology is used to indicate condition:
 - Good: Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious and comfortable; indicators are excellent.
 - Stable: Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious, possibly uncomfortable; indicators are favourable.
 - Serious: Vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits. Patient is acutely ill; indicators are questionable.
 - Critical: Vital signs are unstable and not within normal limits. Patient may not be conscious; indicators are unfavourable.
- At the direction of the VIHA Chief Medical Health Officer, consent to release information or a name is not required in a situation deemed to pose a risk to public health. This information is released by the Chief Medical Health Officer or their designate.
- Whenever possible, before releasing information about a patient, VIHA Communications will attempt to ensure the patient/family/guardian are aware of the limited information that is to be released and obtain their consent.

- Death may be confirmed, provided next-of-kin has been notified. The cause of death may not be released without consent of legal representative.
- With the specific signed consent of the patient/family/guardian, VIHA may release limited patient information as follows:
 - Full name of patient
 - Patient's age
 - Patient's home community
 - Confirmation of hospitalization
 - Admission and discharge dates
 - Confirmation of birth, if applicable
 - Condition as outlined above.

VIHA Communications Department contact information:

- Weekends and after hours (all locations): Media Pager: 250-389-7317
- Regular Business Hours:
 - Campbell River Hospital: 250-739-6303
 - Cowichan District Hospital: 250-740-6980
 - Nanaimo Regional General Hospital 250-740-6980
 - Port Hardy Hospital 250-739-6303
 - Port McNeill Hospital 250-739-6303
 - Royal Jubilee Hospital 250-370-8270
 - Tofino General Hospital 250-740-6980
 - Victoria General: 250-370-8270
 - West Coast General Hospital 250-740-6980