

Five tips for Communication Managers during a General Election campaign



1 The Board

Ensure your Board has an Elections' Policy in place

Until the dissolution of Parliament MPs have a constitutional right to represent their constituents and should be accorded normal access to the NHS. Once Parliament is dissolved these rights disappear and all candidates are on the same footing. The key is to avoid being accused of discriminating against a candidate and remain politically impartial during a general election campaign.

2 Staff

NHS employees are free to express their political views but should not do so on NHS premises or use NHS equipment. Neither should they express views that impact on the impartiality of the NHS. Employees engaged on national pay and conditions can be granted special leave of absence (paid or unpaid) during the campaign to stand for election. Boards and Non-Executives, under the Representation of the People's Act 1983 (Amended) and the Disqualification Act 1975, are prohibited from standing for election and would have to resign before presenting their nomination to the returning officer.

3 Visits

Campaign visits are at the discretion of the Board. Broadly they are usually allowed and must be even handed and not disruptive. Posters and stickers should not be allowed. Election meetings should not be on NHS premises. Photographs should not be taken showing identifiable patients without their consent, obtained in advance and, even better, in writing. Similarly filming of patients by TV crews, where patients are identifiable, also requires the completion of patient consent form before filming.

4 Information

Factual information should be made available in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoI), promptly and in any event within 20 days. Pre-existing arrangements for Board meetings should continue, but public meetings are better avoided.

5 Records

Record all information provided to the candidates. It is not necessary to provide all candidates with the answers provided to one candidate's questions.

Records should be available for inspection by the Communications Governance Committee or the Board.

Media enquiries should be limited to provision of facts and the FoI. National policy enquires should be dealt with by the DH. Department of Health's Election Guidance has not been updated since 2001 but will almost certainly be revisited, although little is likely to change. View the present guidance [here](#).

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