Taking a Team Approach to Your Digital Communications Strategy:

CDC’s Response to the Outbreak of Fungal Meningitis and Other Infections

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A Story of Relevance

Every discovery during an investigation informs prevention
“Before I tell the story – I would encourage you to think about this from a Crisis Leadership and Crisis Communications perspective…and from that vantage point spend some time on the CDC website, reading news stories and following the information trail. They have done an excellent job in communicating this story to clinicians and patients alike. From the website, to FAQs, to clinician webinars…the CDC has been transparent, clear, direct and timely.”
“What a horrible and fascinating medical drama is unfolding in front of our eyes! And from a perspective of crisis leadership and crisis communications it is pretty darn interesting. What is it? The multistate fungal meningitis outbreak among patients who received contaminated steroid injections. Unless you are totally off the grid, this would be a difficult story to miss.”

Reflections On Contemporary Issues In The Fields Of Business Continuity Planning & Emergency Management
October 20, 2012

Advancing communications

Why team?

Lessons
Scattered across the carefully landscaped main campus of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are the staff on the front lines fighting a rare outbreak of fungal meningitis.

CBS News October 15, 2012


“With a dangerous disease outbreak hits social media, the connected generation trusts some governmental agencies more than others, and Twitter users tend not to panic. These are the main takeaways of an analysis of tweets sent in the past month in regards to the recent meningitis outbreak. The data was collected by iMedSocial, a social media consultancy in public health industries, using SDL|SM2, a tool that analyzes tweets and other social media.

Looking at tweets sent after news of the outbreak came out, Twitter users searched for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) more often than the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The meningitis outbreak, which was first reported on Sept. 18, in Tennessee, is caused by a contaminated steroid drug which was injected into the spines of patients who had back pain. The disease was caused by a fungus contained in a drug produced by the New England Compounding Center, a compounding pharmacy that produces drugs that are not under the same scrutiny as the ones produced by regular pharmaceuticals.”

Mashable.com October 16, 2012

http://mashable.com/2012/10/16/twitter-menlingitis-outbreak/
When it comes to a public health crisis, the public apparently wants to know what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has to say.

Fedblog
October 16, 2012

“If we want to be trusted in a crisis, we have to build that trust before the crisis. And there’s no shortcut for doing that.”

The Face of the Matter
October 17, 2012

Building Trust is an Everyday Job

It’s not often that I come across situations that involve crisis communications, public health, social media and reputation management. Call it the Jim Garrow quadfecta (yes, I just made that up). But today I have one. And it’s a doozy.

Unless you’ve been ignoring the national news (and local news in 14 states thus far), you are aware of the meningitis outbreak associated with contaminated steroids. When the story first broke out of Tennessee, and we learned more about the
Blog Question?

James Woulfe on October 17, 2012 at 4:18 pm said:

Great article, Jim.

Is the general public’s respect for the CDC at least somewhat a remnant of a “Hot Zone” or “Contagion” effect? Hollywood makes CDC reps look like medical super sleuths and the public naturally assumes they are capable and credible.

Blog Response:

“I would say that their [CDC] participating in those exercises (especially Contagion and Walking Dead), increases the approachability of the org.

But at the end of the day, it’s the hard, day-to-day, unsexy, small communications that build that trust.”
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Why team?

Lessons
“My Way!... No,
My Way!”
Developing a Plan

- **Internal Communications**
  - Dropped everything (else we were working on)
  - Defined roles and responsibilities
  - Aligned thinking and platforms (including web)
  - Cleared all online and print content

- **External Communications**
  - Prioritized media and web
  - Leveraged work in place
  - Communicated what we knew and did not know
  - Advanced understanding of outbreak response, a rare fungus, and patient notification strategies

- **Partnership Communications**
  - Got ahead of stakeholder requests for information and meetings
  - Used established networks and partnerships
  - Connected to FDA and State information
Communicating Complexity

Rare fungus, not known to cause human meningitis

Many dates, players, and products

- [09-26-2012] Voluntary recall of 3 lots of NECC MPA
- [10-6-2012] Voluntary recall of all NECC products
- [10-12-2012] Connection between NECC and Ameridose announced
- [10-15-2012] Sterility of any injectable drugs, including ophthalmic drugs and cardioplegic solutions significant
- [10-31-2012] Voluntary recall of all unexpired Ameridose products in circulation
Communicating Complexity

Includes

- Prominent link to landing page on main homepage
- "Current Situation" feed of latest news
- "How CDC is responding to information"
- Clear information on outbreak: “This form of meningitis is not contagious.”
- At-a-glance box with quick info on outbreak
- Current case count map
- Related links for more info about meningitis
- Links to other federal agencies involved in investigation
- Special link with info for medical professionals
- FAQs for public and patients
- Press link with latest releases
- Prominent links on how to contact the CDC

CDC adopts lead role in communicating deadly meningitis outbreak.

“CDC’s landing page includes updates and answers for a variety of audiences. It is an outline of best practices for any response site.”

RAGAN’s PR Daily, October 15, 2012
Advancing communications

Why team?

Lessons
Lessons Learned

- It takes focus and a strong team to pull this together
- Good science and good communication go hand-in-hand
- Be strategic, not reactive
- Identify and use existing platforms and partners
- Examine information in different ways
- Work with partners to release information
- Risk communication is an ongoing activity
- It's never “over”
Got team?
Yes
Many people beyond those mentioned here contributed to the results presented today.

This work would not have been possible without the efforts of state and local health departments to detect, investigate, and report the outbreak of fungal meningitis and other infections.
Thank You

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.