

The Organisation

Catholic Healthcare is one of the largest Catholic providers of aged, community and healthcare services. Operating in New South Wales and South East Queensland, it runs several Aged care facilities in Central NSW and the St Vincents Private Hospital in Bathurst.

The Situation

Due to the structure and costs of the St Vincents facility it had been operating at a loss for some time and with all avenues for saving the hospital being exhausted, Catholic Healthcare had decided that there was no choice but to close the hospital. Given the highly political nature of the decision and probable backlash from the community, Catholic Healthcare engaged RIM to crisis manage the communications of this announcement internally and externally.

The Process

The process included:

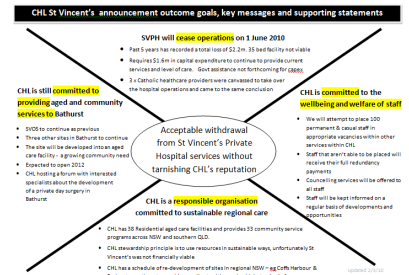
- Production of a communications plan
- Research for positive story angles
- Developing key messages relating to the announcement
- Writing releases & fact sheets
- Writing letters to the Government
- Media training
- Management of media
- Liaison with politicians and key community members to generate alternatives for the service

Hurdles

- The story was leaked so the process started well before we were ready to manage - requiring quick decisions and work on the hop
- A highly inflammatory and passionate subject
- The media consistently erring on the negative side
- Daily/hourly change & story developments
- Key staff inexperience with the media

Results

- Media & public backlash was minimised through communicating the sound reasoning behind the decision, commitment to staff obligations and an openness to options should the community rally government support.
- Staff, Drs and public were encouraged to have their say and participate in an generating alternative options for the continuation of hospital services
- The communication process enabled an on-going viable alternative to hospital services to be developed (private day surgery facility)
- Story quickly turned from a focus on Catholic Healthcare to a focus on government support.



CHL St Vincent's - Bathurst Communication Strategy - 2009 - 2010

Task	Requirements/needs	Messages	Timing & Frequency	Additional info	Follow-up/ongoing	Responsible	External services
Production of communications plan
Research for positive story angles
Developing key messages
Writing releases & fact sheets
Writing letters to the Government
Media training
Management of media
Liaison with politicians



Positive signs for funding assistance to transition Bathurst's Private Day Surgery to state government

Last week Catholic Healthcare sent an urgent letter to NSW Health Minister regarding funding assistance to enable an on-going day surgical facilities for Bathurst community.

Since this initial contact Catholic Healthcare has been having constructive discussions with the Minister and his staff to explore the possible form and timeframe of capital assistance from the Commonwealth Government.

Yesterday, Catholic Healthcare issued Mr Debus on the occasion of the final meeting with Day Procedures Australia to the on-going on-going day surgical facilities for Bathurst.

Mr Debus welcomed the positive news that a consortium of doctors is keenly considering establishing day surgery services for the Bathurst community and commended Catholic Healthcare's commitment to work with the Minister Day Surgery services until a new site is identified & developed.

Mr Debus has encouraged Catholic Healthcare to apply to the Department of Health & Ageing for a capital grant to enable day surgery services to remain open until the new facility is constructed.

The capital grant would be used under the National Regional Infrastructure Health Program.

We greatly appreciate Mr Debus' support to achieve Catholic Healthcare's goal of on-going private day surgery services for Bathurst's aged & frail. Thank you, Catholic Healthcare.

Media enquiries: Samantha Hoar (02) 6888 1145

Day surgery plan after private hospital closure

The operator of Bathurst's St Vincent's private hospital is considering keeping the surgical services open for up to a year after the closure of the hospital.

Catholic Healthcare announced yesterday it will close the hospital in June because of "significant financial losses", making with it about 100 jobs.

However, in a meeting with medical staff last night, Catholic Healthcare said it would consider maintaining a day surgery facility, while longer term arrangements were made.

Ophthalmic surgeon Roger Hammers says it is a good job because it will stop services from lapsing.

