

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL¹

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2005 - 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the Communication Strategy of the Medical Research Council for the period 2005 – 2010. Its primary purpose is to identify and articulate key communication strategies that are aimed at creating a conducive environment for the implementation of the Medical Research Council's Business and Strategic Plans; and developing a positive image of the MRC to the Ministries of Health, Science and Technology and the South African public through relevant and accurate health research.

2. CONTEXT

The Communication Strategy is premised on and takes account of three contextual factors, namely:

- Government's overall strategy.
- The MRC's Strategic Plan (2005 – 2010).
- The Business Plan of the MRC.

3. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

This Communication Strategy positions communications, as a strategic management function to support the Medical Research Council (MRC) to realize their strategic objectives and is developed against the backdrop of the strategic environment within which the MRC operates. Even though the MRC has a media policy, a communications strategy takes into consideration other modes of communication channels, i.e. research translation, community liaison, schools liaison, science communication, events management, stakeholder relations, lobbying, hosting conferences and workshops, and lastly imbizo's.

¹ MRC's communication strategy doc – February 2007

The MRC has identified nine key strategic imperatives. It has several strategic challenges as well as several research priorities, which constitute the building blocks of the strategic environment. All these can be found in the MRC Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010 document.

The communication strategy will amongst others focus on the following areas, they are:

- 3.1 To promote excellence in research through sustainability & growth of the MRC.
- 3.2 To showcase the continued development of our research, which is based on the South Africa's national health priorities, but with a global comparative advantage and with strong local relevance and impact.
- 3.3 To ensure through our research translation efforts that the MRC has invested its resources in high-quality and priority-driven research based on Burden of Disease priorities, strategic priorities, international health research trends and an appropriate research mix. (Basically we will be communication all our research done in the areas of communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases or chronic diseases and violence and injuries.)
- 3.4 Through regular stakeholder meetings, community liaison meetings, through community participation work and through our efforts of public relation we help strengthen the position of the MRC as a science/evidence-based organisation providing credible information and policy support
- 3.5 To promote the development and implementation of research, which further the aims of NEPAD.
- 3.6 To further develop and implement strategies for capacity development and retention of staff to broaden and enrich the health research base at the MRC and South Africa.
- 3.7 To help build the efforts of our capacity development office in fostering and enhancing partnerships with the higher education sector.

- 3.8 To assist in improving the relationship with the key stakeholders to the mutual benefit of both parties through our stakeholder relations office.

4. **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

The communication strategy in terms of which the MRC will plan, structure and execute communication objectives and activities consists of four basic elements, namely:

- Key principles underlying the strategy.
- Communication objectives.
- Core activities underpinning the execution of the strategy.
- Strategic themes.

4.1 **Key principles underlying the strategy.**

- A close alignment to be established between President of the MRC, the MRC's operational plans and the communications plan.
- The MRC President, the Research Unit Directors and specially identified researchers / scientists play a specific role in the achievement of the strategic objectives of communication.
- That whilst some areas may need continuous updating, the communication policy adopted by EMC in 2007 provides a framework for communication processes and practices, particularly with dealing with the media.

4.2 **Strategic communication objectives:**

The following reflect the three strategic objectives of communication as well as the strategies to be implemented to achieve these strategic objectives:

4.2.1 To create a conducive environment for the implementation of the MRC's Business Plan and 5-year strategic plan, through the following strategies:

- Raising awareness of and popularising the policies, research programmes, research and services of the MRC through the development and implementation

of integrated marketing communication campaigns.

- Informing the beneficiaries of their rights and other stakeholders of their obligations through the development and production of information, education and communication (IEC) materials.
- Creating mutual understanding between the MRC and the Departments of Health & Science and Technology on one hand and the various stakeholders the MRC President and the Research Units interact with or whose good will the MRC require for the successful accomplishment of the MRC's Business Plan and/or the MRC's strategic plan. This we feel can only work through the development and implementation of a unified stakeholders relations programme.

4.2.2 To promote and sustain a positive image of both the MRC Presidency as well as the Research Units through the following strategies:

- Developing and implementing integrated marketing and advertising programmes.
- Managing the communication environment
- Developing and implementing corporate identity programmes for the MRC.
- Exploiting public relations opportunities and maximising campaign/prominent days (health days) to position the MRC positively in the public mind.

4.2.3 To leverage national framework, strengthen and reposition the internal communication structures, and to enhance its support to programmes and provincial offices through:

- Implementing national standards for communications within the MRC.
- Optimisation of provincial, regional and local communication structures – advancing the MRC's strategic objectives.
- To leverage internal communication resources and capabilities for harmonised and synergised strategic communication interventions.

4.3 Core activities underpinning the execution of the Communication Strategy.

- 4.3.1 Publicity strategies and media events coordination.
- 4.3.2 Developing relations with the media fraternity and sustaining positive rapport with the media.
- 4.3.3 Marketing and advertising. (design elements)
- 4.3.4 Media surveillance, research and analysis.
- 4.3.5 Crisis and issue management.
- 4.3.6 Lobbying and advocacy strategies.
- 4.3.7 Events Management
- 4.3.8 Corporate Identity Programme
- 4.3.9 Internal communications.
- 4.3.10 Stakeholder and stakeholder environment analysis.
- 4.3.11 Provincial, schools, community and Government Department stakeholder liaison.
- 4.3.12 Production of below the line (*caps, t-shirts, pop-up stands, logos*) advertising and promotional materials.
- 4.3.13 Science writing / reporting
- 4.3.14 Science media training
- 4.3.15 Science photography and videography
- 4.3.16 Website content

4.4 Strategic Themes

The following themes, which characterize the strategic direction, of the MRC, form the basis of the Communication Strategy.

4.4.1 **Impact of health research on the South African Health Policies**

- Impact of health policies in SA
- Implementation of health research legislation
- Review of health research legislation

4.4.2 **To foster the development of research which is based on South Africa's national health priorities but with a global comparative advantage with a strong relevance and impact.**

- Facilitate greater business development
- Attract international funding opportunities
- Foster a culture of research collaboration
- Develop and maintain a database of health research

4.4.3 To strengthen the position of the MRC as a science/evidence-based organisation providing credible information and policy support.

- Policy briefs, media releases, seminars, conferences
- Website information in lay man's language
- Encourage science and technology at schools
- Tailor info for different audiences

4.4.4 To promote the development and implementation of research which further the aims of NEPAD.

- Enhance research projects in Africa
- Initiate new programmes with other science councils on the African continent
- Implement health policies in relation to the aims of NEPAD

4.4.5 To further develop and implement strategies for capacity development and retention to broaden the health research base as well as strengthen partnerships with the higher education sector.

- Market science & technology in schools and universities and communities
- Skills development
- Implement and monitor agreements with universities aimed at developing health research

4.4.6 To improve the relationship with key stakeholders to the mutual benefit of both parties.

- Position the MRC as a flexible, responsive unit able to respond DoH requests
- Actively promote & lobby the image, quality and capacity of the MRC
- Showcase the MRC as the leading science council in the Africa.
- Create extensive media activity around Health Days as specified by the Ministry of Health
- Showcase our health research through extensive marketing and PR initiatives, viz. launches, open days, advertisements, radio and TV talk shows, media

interviews and publishing of articles, newsletters and website development

4.4.7 Service Delivery

- Introduction of IT solutions / Knowledge Management
- Introduction of innovative ways of doing business, e.g. Public, Private Partnerships
- Improving the website of the MRC
- Updating the MRC website on a weekly or daily basis

5. CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of the MRC's Communication Strategy is dependent on:

- Ensuring that the strategy is not driven by one individual but by the collective input of all senior officials within the MRC.
- Senior officials being sensitive to the importance of promptly responding to media queries and to pre-empt negative publicity.
- That communications be a part of every researcher, scientists and senior official's KRA's.
- Identify and train spokespeople within the organisation to represent each of the MRC's research units and ensure that media training occurs.
- Creating extensive media activity around all health days specified by the Ministry of Health
- Ensuring that there are proper coordination between the MRC President's office and the Research Programmes.
- An implementation plan that gives effect to the intent of the overall communication strategy.

End