

## Mission Critical: Physician Communication and Engagement During COVID-19

In a recent [Forum for Healthcare Strategists](#) webinar, leaders from three health systems joined experts from [Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock](#) and [Barlow/McCarthy](#) to share strategies and best practices for reaching physicians, employed and independent, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a follow-up to the webinar, **Kriss Barlow**, Principal at Barlow/McCarthy, responded to several questions submitted by webinar participants. Following are her responses.

### 1. How can healthcare organizations communicate with community physicians versus employed physicians?

**Barlow:** Most organizations are providing a standard set of materials for their primary care audience. As you are able, the ability to use communication tools for shared purposes makes great sense. The communication for community and employed doctors generally includes updated clinical care information, government mandates, cases, local testing details, consumer facing information, FAQs, a contact point, and the date that the information was posted. Employed physicians, especially primary care doctors, will need more details including the internal processes, protocols, access to PPE, billing details, and sometimes HR needs at the clinic level.

Likely the first wave of materials has already been sent via an email with links or a general mailing. To keep community physicians up-to-date, consider weekly email updates with links and call out any important new information. Supplement this with a physician relations team that can provide an initial call and then bi-weekly updates to learn of additional needs and gather feedback from the practices for hospital leadership.

### 2. Our system needs to communicate with community (non-employed) physicians and their practice leaders. Has anyone set up a community practice leader briefing? How has the response been?

**Barlow:** Most liaison teams are actively connecting with practice leaders; it's a very important audience. This includes the phone calls and personal texts to the practice, but some are also creating customized email campaigns. The marketing team is providing content for the physician relations team to send in a weekly email. It includes updates from internal physician experts along with processes, webinar/education resources, and access information. They've fielded lots of questions that are used in the next message. Feedback has been excellent.

### 3. How are hospitals using their physician liaisons to share information with independent physicians?

**Barlow:** Physician relations/liaison teams are functioning in a variety of roles. Most of their virtual connections are spent with the loyal community doctors and the independent groups. The roles are evolving as we get more comfortable with the virtual communication tools. Many are supporting the roll-out of telemedicine; some serve as a resource for information on testing facilities, PPE, and access to information. Beyond the "go-to" portion of the job, however, they are playing an important role in proactive virtual outreach to the practices to provide direction and resources and to assess practice needs. While the world is focused on COVID-19, patients still have new diagnoses of cancers, heart disease, or other health concerns. Community doctors are working with liaison teams to gain access to care. Teams are doing well-being surveys with practices and other survey work—again, all virtually. They are also coordinating town hall type meetings for the community doctors. These have been very well received.

### 4. As a Homecare/Hospice Liaison, how can I facilitate physician communication?

**Barlow:** Assuming your team is providing ongoing home care, virtual visits to the referring physician offices via phone calls or emails are encouraged. The calls will be two-fold. It will be important for the doctors to connect with your team for ongoing care you are providing to their patients. It will also be important to let them know if there are changes in your service or the approach to accessing your service.

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