

Excellence Awards - 2021 Entry  
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Entry ID: 9607

### Third Party Authorization

*Are you entering on behalf of, or in association with, any third party?:* No

### Basic Information

*Category:* 27. Outstanding Young Communicator

### Entry Information

*Entrant company name:* Croydon Health Services NHS Trust

*Entry title:*

Christina Clynes, Head of Communications and Fundraising

### Entry

*Demonstrate your commitment to professional development and your career growth:*

Since 2010, I have progressed from PR Assistant to Head of Communications and Fundraising. I have demonstrated a commitment to the development of my professional skills throughout, starting with my CIPR accredited BA (Hons) in PR & Communications.

I am keen to share best practice with others and after delivering a number of successful projects, have hosted presentations for up to 100 communications professionals at events including the Comms 2point0 masterclass and Wellcome Trust's Press Officers' Conference.

Development is just as important for my team as it is for myself and, as part of their appraisal, every team member is asked to identify training they would like over the next year. Two of my team members are now completing leadership courses and another is completing a Photoshop course, to further develop our in-house skills.

In Autumn 2020, I began an Executive MBA, a significant undertaking that will further my knowledge and help me to ensure communications is seen as a strategic business tool.

In September, 2020 I was awarded a CMI Special Award of Recognition for my role as an NHS leader during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Outline your work-related achievements over the last two years and how they*

*contribute to the wider industry:*

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Our hospital was selected as one of the first in the world to receive a shipment of the COVID-19 vaccine.

While the delivery dates had not been publicly announced for security reasons, we knew that our delivery would be one of the first and that we had the opportunity to capture a momentous occasion in the fight against Coronavirus.

In advance of its arrival, I pitched the opportunity to NHS England colleagues and we agreed a pool camera and photographer from Sky News and the Press Association to attend the event and capture it in a safe, secure manner.

I worked with the teams to facilitate filming and interviews with our staff, which were then pooled across all media, meaning Croydon was the only hospital in the UK to have its shipment filmed that day. This meant that the Trust, alongside our spokespeople, were featured in every national news outlet ahead of the vaccine roll-out, putting Croydon on the map internationally.

In 2020, I also was successful in securing £220,000 to increase capacity, expertise and resilience within the Communications team in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working with the Director of Communications, I set out my intentions for the team expansion, benchmarking against other organisations and explaining the pressures placed on our existing staff.

I outlined the benefits that additional staff could bring, in line with the organisation's objectives and developed a full business case, which I presented to the Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer at the Trust's Operational Recovery Board as a formal request for investment. I was successful and the team has now been expanded to nine employees, doubling its size.

While this may not be traditionally considered a 'communications' achievement, I believe this highlights my ability to champion our business function at Board level and has resulted in the progression of other communications professionals, developing talent and supporting them with their future careers.

Alongside this, I was asked to take on additional responsibility as Head of Communications and Fundraising. I am now responsible for growing the profile or and income to, the Croydon Health Service Charitable Fund, as well as the delivery of charitable projects for the benefit of staff and patients.

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*Provide an outline of a work-related challenge you have faced in the last 12 months, including details of what happened, how you overcame it and what you learnt from it:*

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Over the past year, I have had to completely change how I communicate with staff and with the media, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overnight our all staff briefings were made virtual, and we embraced technology we had never used before so that we could continue to talk to our teams. Our media handling also had to be strengthened, challenging inaccuracies and pushing for factual information to be shared with the public to cut through the chatter on social media.

Communications has never played a more important role in protecting lives, whether explaining complex safety guidance, providing reassurance in the face of a crisis or adequately sharing the experiences of frontline clinicians with sensitivity and authenticity, despite conspiracy theories.

In a major incident, communications teams are privy to a huge amount of information and will have access to clinical areas treating seriously ill patients.

Some of this can be difficult to process if you are not used to working in these types of environments, for example, when donning full PPE to film in our COVID-19 intensive care unit with the BBC, working alongside clinicians to show the true picture of the NHS' pandemic response.

As such, I have learnt a lot about my own resilience and that of my team. To enable my team and I to digest everything we hear and see, it's vital that this is recognised and that teams are provided with the same support and downtime needed by frontline workers.

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*Provide an outline of a piece of work you have delivered or contributed to in the last 12 months that you are particularly proud of including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:*

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Throughout the pandemic, it was essential that staff morale remained a key focus.

Our priorities were to:

- Ensure staff feel informed and reassured to when communicating COVID-19 guidance
- Minimise impact of COVID-19 pandemic on staff morale by ensuring a regular stream of staff engagement activities
- Boost staff pride and recognition of their efforts through sustained media and social media coverage
- Support the delivery of fundraising activities and charitable initiatives to bolster staff wellbeing in the workplace

Open conversation between staff and senior managers was vital and became our primary strategy in delivering internal communications. Instead of face-to-face meetings, we launched twice weekly webinars, with over 100 delivered between March 2020 – February 2021 attracting 200-400 staff each time.

I sought out a regular stream of positive staff and patient case studies and sold these in to media, including our first COVID-19 patient to leave intensive care. The story was featured on the front page of the Evening Standard and across BBC News, with video footage viewed over 100,000 times online.

I also supported the Trust in securing £252,000 in donations specifically relating to COVID-19, including £13,000 through JustGiving and £162,100 in grant applications.

With these funds I launched a number of staff wellbeing initiatives including a dedicated wellbeing week and the delivery of refurbished rest areas for staff to relax.

We have secured over 70 positive pieces of coverage secured between March 2020 – February 2021, including in national news outlets Good Morning Britain, BBC News, Sky News, ITV News and Mail Online, telling the true story of Croydon's achievements.

This year's staff survey results showed an increase in the number of staff who would recommend the Trust as a place to work, a five-year high. Results also demonstrated that

staff felt more supported with their wellbeing, with our overall score jumping 4% in one year.

**Supporting Information**

*Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):*

Provided

*Campaign image (if entering individual/team awards, upload headshot/team photo here):*

Provided

*Company logo:*

Provided

*Please write a 30 word entry summary in the third person:*

Christina has been nominated for her significant contributions to NHS communications, delivering award-winning documentaries and leading Croydon's NHS response to the COVID-19 pandemic.