

We Hear You:

Communication Matters

Since the outset of the pandemic, researchers from Saskatchewan universities and colleges have been learning from people just like you – healthcare employees struggling to navigate work in a pandemic. In sharing heartfelt stories of your struggles and your work to redefine success, you emphasized four things that deeply affected your experience of work in a pandemic – teamwork, communication, leadership and burnout. This newsletter series summarizes some of the valuable things we learned through your stories. One topic was raised more often than any other by healthcare employees who were interviewed about their experience working in a pandemic: communication. Here is what we learned by listening closely to your feedback.

Consistency is Key

When you are in the middle of a crisis, it can feel as though there is a lot of communication and information coming at you from all levels - from Medical Health Officers to the Minister of Health. Sometimes, the messages from different parties seemed to conflict, leading to confusion about how to put the messages into action.

“It’s been such a whirlwind... our manager would tell us one thing, go to her office, get an email and come back out, as something has changed.”

You told us that simplified and less frequent communication would help people feel better informed overall, and that it helps to know who to rely on for specific types of information.

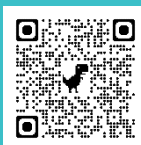
Clear communication helps us manage change

It is very frustrating when things change quickly, and there is no doubt that we all had to adapt very quickly at work during the pandemic. Given the influx of information and the pace of change, you told us it was helpful when clear, concise and open conversations between management took place regularly to make sure that everyone had the information they needed.

“Probably three quarters of the staff did not know that we have an occupation health and safety hotline for testing and advice... there is a disconnect where they’ve got this stuff available, but we’re not getting that information.”



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Communication innovations

Although there were many communications challenges, you also told us about some communication innovations, ranging from video conferencing with consultants and family caregivers to creating new processes to allow for rapid information flow during outbreaks. We want to learn more from you about what changed for the better at work, and about where there is more potential to improve communications processes for everyday work and during outbreaks. Consider sharing your ideas with your supervisor, participating in research, or watching for consultation opportunities over the coming year.

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Communication matters. It is time to work on ways to start more conversations and develop more bottom-up conversational flow.

As the emergency period extended, the top-down approach weakened

During emergencies, a top down style of communication is often used. In this format, a key decision-maker takes responsibility for issuing directives which are then implemented or operationalized by several different units. You told us that this was accepted as necessary at the beginning of the pandemic. And yet, you found over time, it was increasingly frustrating not to have a voice in policies that affected your work and your patients' care. You emphasized strongly that the importance of finding a way for direct caregivers and others directly affected by policies to provide initial input, seek clarification, and offer feedback.



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