

Telling Your Story

*A hospital toolkit for
Cover the Uninsured Week (May 1 - 8)
and National Hospital Week (May 8 - 14)*

This toolkit can help you and your staff prepare for CTUW and National Hospital Week – and get your great story out to your community – the people who rely on you for health care. It contains key messages, how-to guides and samples of communications vehicles – all designed to help you deliver your hospital’s message of caring to your community. Using this as a guide, you’ll be able to tailor your message and activities leading up to CTUW and National Hospital Week and ensure your community understands the care you provide 24 hours a day – 365 days a year.

In order to be proactive about sharing the good work of your hospital and support CTUW and National Hospital Week, plan to ***tell your story*** in late April. You could:

Have others help tell the story: *Identify community leaders, patients, nurses, doctors and hospital staff who can tell personal stories about the contribution of the hospital to the community and their experiences caring for the uninsured. Such stories may be communicated in a number of ways: news releases, news events, guest columns, letters to the editor and PSA announcements.*

Create an event: *One event idea local hospitals may want to consider is a “Hands Around Our Hospital Day” to kick off Cover the Uninsured Week. This suggested event would recognize hospital volunteers and staff that provide “a hand” to those who need it in the community.*

- Recognize hospital staff and volunteers responsible for free screenings and clinics
- Create banners to be hung outside of your hospital; the “hands” around the hospital would represent each life helped or saved by the hospital

Share the story: *Share the stories you develop broadly with employees, friends and family. Also, consider sharing what you develop with state hospital associations.*

- Include in the hospital newsletter
- Distribute your materials at each local event during Cover the Uninsured Week and Hospital Week

Index of Toolkit Materials

In this toolkit, you will find a “How-To” Guide and a Sample of the following:

- Hospital Spokespeople
- Press Release
- Guest Column
- Letters to the Editor
- Community Care Fact Sheet
- Billing Fact Sheet
- News Clip Distribution
- PSAs (attached are examples of case study ads developed by AHA you may also want to use as a template)
- Radio Strategy
- Speakers Bureau

While this toolkit can help you and your team prepare for CTUW and National Hospital Week, it also provides great resources for sharing your story at any time!

How-to: Hospital Spokespeople

Proactive efforts prior to Cover the Uninsured Week and National Hospital Week likely will generate media inquiries to your hospital. Your outreach to the media through your hospital news release, guest column or letter to your community calendar could also create some interest from reporters.

Since reporters will want to talk to experts about your issues, create a **list of potential hospital spokespeople**. Consistent with your message, the list should emphasize the care side of your hospital rather than the business side of your hospital. This will streamline the process for the hospital in deciding whom to contact, and will make the reporter happy by helping to give instant access to the information desired.

Your spokesperson list should include full **names**, professional **titles** or hospital **affiliations**, all relevant **contact information** (including office, cell and fax numbers and an email address) and an indication of **specific topics** on which each individual is an expert. And of course ensure that a member of your PR team is present during the interview.

LOCAL Hospital Spokespeople

The following people are available to handle all media enquiries. For assistance or to arrange an interview, please contact the hospital communications office at 555-555-5555.

Name	Title/affiliation	Topics of expertise
Dr. John Doe	Chairman of the board, LOCAL Hospital	Board activities, hospital policies, hospital vision
Doug Francis	Community outreach coordinator, LOCAL Hospital	Community outreach programs including free immunizations, traveling free clinics
Rebecca Hunter	Emergency room nurse	Patient triage, emergency room care
Maria Rosa	Community member	Interacting with the hospital as an uninsured mother of three
Herb Jones	Volunteer	Patient care

[Sample – News Release]
not for distribution

LOCAL *Hospital*

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

CONTACT: [NAME]
[OFFICE #] (direct)
[CELL #] (mobile)
[EMAIL ADDRESS]

**[LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] CELEBRATES ‘HANDS AROUND OUR
HOSPITAL DAY’**

Events recognize the men and women dedicated to caring for our community

[LOCAL TOWN] ([DATE], 2005) – The men and women who serve and care for Americans through our nation’s hospitals dedicate their lives to caring for their communities. To recognize them and their commitment, [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] joins hospitals across the country to celebrate “Hands Around our Hospital Day.”

“‘Hands Around our Hospital Day’ is truly a time to celebrate the special individuals that give of their time and talent, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, both inside and outside the walls of their hospitals, to serve the people in their communities,” said [RANKING SPOKESPERSON NAME], [TITLE] of [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME].

“People in need of a ‘helping hand’ have long turned to [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] in times of illness,” [RANKING SPOKESPERSON NAME] said. “Today, [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] provides so much more. From preventive care to educational programs to charity work, [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] and all the nation’s hospitals take an active role to help the physical, mental, psychological and social health of all people in their communities.”

For [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME], “all of the people” means just that – all of the people. The talented individuals who work and volunteer at [LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME] spend every day meeting the needs of the young and old, men and women, of all economic backgrounds. One of the ways these individuals lend a ‘helping hand’ is by helping patients navigate their health care costs, regardless of their ability to pay.

[INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT THE LOCAL HOSPITAL’S PRACTICES (i.e. What happens if a patient doesn’t have insurance? How can a person interact with/receive help from the hospital if he or she can’t afford to pay? Is there a number that a person can call to get help with this?)

“Hands Around our Hospital Day” will kickoff **[LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME]**’s participation in Cover the Uninsured Week (May 1-8) and National Hospital Week (May 8-14). For more information about **[LOCAL HOSPITAL NAME]**’s plans to celebrate these events, please **[DETAILS FOR MORE LOCAL INFORMATION (i.e. phone number to call, hospital Web site, etc.)]**

[LOCAL HOSPITAL BOILERPLATE]

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How-to: Guest Column

One great way to share the good work you do at your hospital every day is to write and submit an opinion or editorial piece to your local paper in the form of a **guest column**.

Most newspapers have an editorial or opinion page that carries columns from syndicated journalists as well as people from the local community. Having a respected member of your community, such as an elected official, member of your board or a local celebrity, submit a guest column to the local paper gives you a chance to tell *your* story, *your* way.

Opinion or editorial pieces are typically 500-800 words. Contact the editorial page editor at your paper for his or her preferred word length. You should also spend time reading a few pieces your paper has published to get an idea for style and tone.

Editorial page editors love to receive columns that take an important yet impersonal issue and tell it in a very human way. **Personal stories** and **local examples** will increase the likelihood your guest column will be published. To get you started, think about how one of these themes is reflected in your hospital and community:

- Π **LOCAL COMMUNITY** – We have a special responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing of the community, both inside and outside the hospital. That is why we are constantly working to identify unmet community needs and develop programs and services to address them.
 - Local examples could include *free immunization services, traveling clinics, wellness classes, meals-on-wheels, etc.*

- Π **CARING** – Our primary mission is to treat each individual with compassion and respect from the bedside to the billing office.
 - Local examples could include *case studies demonstrating how your hospital has helped individual patients from time of admittance through hospital stay to post-discharge.*

- Π **CHARITY** – “One size rarely fits all” – when it comes to treating a sick patient or when it comes to a patient’s ability to pay the hospital bill. We understand that and are working hard to develop solutions to help our patients deal with the cost of their care in a compassionate, responsible and dignified manner.
 - Local examples could include *stories about helping patients who qualify apply for and receive public assistance, working with patients to implement reasonable payment plans, offering discounts to under- and uninsured patients, etc.*

**Your local hospital:
A community partnership of “needs” and “wants”**
By Susanna Oh, RN

Making a determination between “wants” and “needs” has never been my forte. As a little girl it was beyond me why a new puppy fell into the “want” category – according to my mother – and not the “need” category. I thought I absolutely needed that puppy. I needed to care for it, and it needed me.

Now I’m grown, working as a nurse at LOCAL Hospital, the “wants” and “needs” in my career meld perfectly without any determination needed on my part. Our community has needs for caring and support regarding its health, and the men and women who serve and care for our community through our hospitals have a need to dedicate their lives to providing that care for their communities.

Everybody wins.

On **[DATE]**, LOCAL Hospital will celebrate “Hands Around our Hospital Day” – a chance to thank and recognize the special individuals that give of their time and talent, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, both inside and outside the walls of their hospitals, to serve the people in their communities.

In 2004, inside our walls, LOCAL Hospital delivered 3,652 babies, casted 1,804 broken bones and provided immunizations to 7,986 children. Beyond our walls, LOCAL Hospital helped 1,297 new mothers learn about nutrition for themselves and their newborns at “New Parent: 101” classes, sponsored three little league teams and delivered more than 11,000 meals to disabled and elderly citizens through the Meals on Wheels program.

Behind each of those numbers is the story of a life touched by a member of the hospital's staff or volunteers. Like the story of Maria Rosa.

Maria is a single mother with three kids, none of whom have health insurance. When her youngest child, Matthew, was 5 years old he developed juvenile diabetes. Maria learned of her son's diagnosis in the LOCAL Hospital emergency room after Matthew fainted for the first time.

The dedicated staff at LOCAL, from the ER doctors to the folks in the hospital billing office, helped Maria apply for federal assistance to manage the costs associated with Matthew's illness, as well as enroll the whole family in a free hospital program for learning how to live a full life with or around diabetes. Matthew was one of 456 new diabetics who learned how to check their blood sugar levels and manage their diets in our "Living with Diabetes" program last year.

People in need have long turned to LOCAL Hospital in times of illness. Today, LOCAL provides so much more. From preventive care to educational programs to charity work, LOCAL and all the nation's hospitals are taking an active role in serving the physical, mental, psychological and social health needs of all people in their communities. The community, in turn, fulfills a need for the hospital staff and volunteers. It fulfills our need to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Letting people know about this partnership, therefore, is both a "need" and "want." I'm glad I don't have to make the distinction.

Susanna Oh is a registered nurse who has worked at LOCAL Hospital for 12 years.

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How-to: Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper gives each hospital and hospital supporter an opportunity to speak to many members of the community – including opinion leaders and elected officials – all at one time. Consider asking a member of your Board of Trustees – or one of the many volunteers at your hospital to write a letter of the editor.

When supporters write a letter to the editor, they want to stay on message by keeping it short – 200 words maximum. Longer letters risk losing the message when cut by the editor. And remember that the people reading the letter – your audience – probably do not know much about your hospital and what makes it special. **Be the expert.**

Personal stories and **local examples** will increase the likelihood the letter to the editor will be published. To get started, think about how one of these themes reflects the hospital and community:

- Π **LOCAL COMMUNITY** – We have a special responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing of the community, both inside and outside the hospital. That is why we are constantly working to identify unmet community needs and develop programs and services to address them.
 - Local examples could include *free immunization services, traveling clinics, wellness classes, meals-on-wheels, etc.*

- Π **CARING** – Our primary mission is to treat each individual with compassion and respect from the bedside to the billing office.
 - Local examples could include *case studies demonstrating how your hospital has helped individual patients from time of admittance through hospital stay to post-discharge.*

- Π **CHARITY** – “One size rarely fits all” – when it comes to treating a sick patient or when it comes to a patient’s ability to pay the hospital bill. We understand that and are working hard to develop solutions to help our patients deal with the cost of their care in a compassionate, responsible and dignified manner.
 - Local examples could include *stories about helping patients who qualify apply for and receive public assistance, working with patients to implement reasonable payment plans, offering discounts to under- and uninsured patients, etc.*

Letters writers should submit the letter to the editor as a business letter, and close it with all contact information, including **full name, address** and **daytime phone number**.

[Sample – Letter to the editor]
not for distribution

LOCAL *Hospital*

Date, 2005

Dear Editor:

More than 23,000 under- and uninsured men, women and children in our community are eligible for free or reduced-cost medical care through their local hospital. Yet many of them are unaware these options exist.

I know because, until recently, I was one of them.

I am a single working mother with three young sons. None of us have health insurance. When my son Matthew was 5 years old he developed juvenile diabetes. I first learned of this diagnosis in the LOCAL Hospital emergency room after Matthew fainted for the first time.

The staff at LOCAL, from the ER doctors to the folks in the hospital billing office, helped me apply for federal assistance to manage the costs associated with Matthew's illness. They also enrolled my whole family in a free program for learning how to live a full life with or around diabetes.

If you or someone you know has been neglecting medical care because of concern about ability to pay, please call LOCAL Hospital at 555-555-5555 or log on to their Web site www.LOCALhospital.org for information about how they can help you.

Your health is too important to risk.

Sincerely,

Maria Rosa
12345 Wisteria Lane
555-345-7777

How-to: Community Care One-pager

Since most people in the community don't spend a lot of time thinking about their local hospital, use this toolkit and period of heightened awareness as an opportunity to educate and remind them about all of the programs the hospital offers.

Make a list of your programs and format them into a one-pager – a handy reference for reporters and attendees at your events to see the larger picture of your work in the community.

It will be especially effective to communicate how your hospital benefits the community in “human” terms rather than in budget, revenue percentage or other “business” terms.

Community Caring
An overview of LOCAL Hospital programs

In 2004, inside our walls, LOCAL Hospital delivered 3,652 babies, casted 1,804 broken bones, provided immunizations to 7,986 children and helped 7,634 uninsured patients receive necessary medical care. Beyond our walls, LOCAL Hospital helped 1,297 new mothers learn about nutrition for themselves and their newborns at “New Parent: 101” classes, sponsored three little league teams and delivered more than 11,000 meals to disabled and elderly citizens through the Meals on Wheels program.

We have a special responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing of the community, both inside and outside the hospital. That is why we are constantly working to identify unmet community needs and develop programs and services to address them. Through our community programs in 2004:

Educational programs

- 1,297 new mothers learned about baby and infant nutrition in our “Mother to Be” courses....
- 456 newly diagnosed diabetics learned how to check their blood sugar levels in our “Living with Diabetes”
- Two community students went off to medical school through the LOCAL Hospital educational scholarship fund....

Community services

- “Infant Exercise” programs two days a week....
- 1,000 hours of volunteerism toward....

Charity care

- 7,634 uninsured patients received necessary medical care....
- 345 families received free immunizations....
- 126,000 teeth were cleaned through our traveling dental clinics....

How-to: Billing Practices One-pager

During a Cover the Uninsured Week or National Hospital Week media inquiry – or even at any other time of the year – questions about billing practices and how hospitals can assist under- or uninsured members of the community with their bills can be expected to arise.

Pulling all of that information together into a single fact sheet will be a valuable resource for reporters, as well as for others in the community who assist those without health coverage.

Consider including the following:

- What programs are available to assist the under- and uninsured?
- Who qualifies for discounted or free care?
- Who should one contact to learn about these programs or to get help with questions?
- How are policies communicated?
- The following services are provided for free: (list all)

Patient-Friendly Billing Practices
Compassionate care from bedside to billing

“One size rarely fits all” when it comes to treating a sick patient or when it comes to a patient’s ability to pay the hospital bill. We understand that and are working hard to develop solutions to help our patients deal with the cost of their care in a compassionate, responsible and dignified manner.

Who can I call for help?

Call the hospital billing office for assistance between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, or 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays. If you reach a voice recording, please leave a number where you can be reached and someone will respond within 24 hours.

Inpatient Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Physician Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Medicare Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Other Billing Questions: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Blue Cross Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Workers Comp Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Medicaid Billing: xxx-xxx-xxxx

What should I do if I’m sick if I cannot pay?

If you’re in need of urgent medical attention, please go directly to the hospital’s emergency department, and you will receive medical care. Your health is critical – payment arrangements can be made after urgent care is received.

When it is time to deal with billing, the hospital has a variety of options available to our patients. We will assist you in determining if you qualify for financial assistance or if there are programs available that will help pay your balance. Please call one of the following numbers for assistance.

For Financial Assistance ----- xxx-xxx-xxxx
For Assistance applying for Medicaid ----- xxx-xxx-xxxx
To set-up payment plans : ----- xxx-xxx-xxxx

Where are you located?

Our office is located near the main lobby of the hospital. Once you enter the front doors, turn to your right and walk past the elevators. We are located at the end of the hallway. If you need assistance, stop at the volunteer’s desk in the main lobby.

How-to: Positive External Coverage

Include a collection of positive news coverage that your hospital has received over the years in your own toolkit or press kit. Reporters and members of the community will be able to see other coverage and examples of the good work you do in your community.

This can include coverage from the **local paper**, mentions in other companies' **newsletters**, notices of **awards** received by hospital programs or employees, or **thank you letters** from elected officials or community leaders.

[Sample - Print Ad/PSA]

LOCAL Hospital depends on hundreds of nurses,
doctors, staff and volunteers to provide care
in Local City...

Ben grew up in Local City
committed to becoming a doctor.
His hard work and dedication went
a long way to making him a great
physician. A medical school
scholarship from the LOCAL
Hospital educational
scholarship fund took him
the rest of the way.

Today Ben oversees
LOCAL's immunization
program for uninsured
kids.

Like
Ben Michael

*Dr. Ben Michael
with his son, Joshua*

As we participate in activities marking Cover the Uninsured Week and National Hospital Week, **LOCAL Hospital** would like to say thank you to all the men and women committed to quality care for all in LOCAL City. Contact LOCAL Hospital at 555-555-5555 for information about hospital programs for the under- an uninsured, or to find out how you can volunteer.

How-to: Radio Strategy

Depending on the size and location of your community and its media market, radio programs could be another way to **tell your story**. Some radio stations have **community profile** or **civic spotlight** programs that cover basic community news and happenings. If a local station near the hospital has such programs, that provides a great opportunity for public outreach.

First, **call the station's program director** and talk about upcoming hospital events or highlight examples of hospital programs such as preventive care, educational programs or charity work, free immunization services, traveling clinics, wellness classes, meals-on-wheels, etc. If any of the examples is particularly timely, that is a good one to point out (i.e. free immunizations during the late-summer to get kids ready to go back to school in the fall).

Before agreeing to supply a guest to appear on the show, **clarify the format of the program**. Listen to the program a few times so you know what to expect. Some points to clarify/consider before agreeing to participate in the show:

- Will the hospital spokesperson be the only guest or will there be others?
- If there are other guests, who are they? What are their backgrounds?
- If there are other guests, is the show set up as a point-counterpoint program? Is it arranged to create controversial situations?
- Will the program include live call-ins from listeners?
- How long is your interview segment?

Once you've clarified the program format and agree to have a hospital representative go on the show, prepare for the interview. Make sure the spokesperson is well-versed in all aspects of hospital programming so he or she can **appear confident and knowledgeable**, even if presented with unexpected questions.

[Sample - Radio PSA]

TITLE: PSA - Thank you for caring

LENGTH: 60 seconds

ANNOUNCER: Hospitals, like LOCAL Hospital, provide quality health care in our community. More than _____ people received emergency treatment, free immunizations or meals-on-wheels, or benefited from one of the many other programs the hospital provides both inside and outside its walls.

Those services depend on hundreds of nurses, doctors, staff and volunteers who are committed to **[OUR COMMUNITY]**.

- Local examples could include *free immunization services, traveling clinics, wellness classes, meals-on-wheels, etc.*
- Local examples could include *case studies demonstrating how your hospital has helped individual patients from time of admittance through hospital stay to post-discharge.*
- Local examples could include *stories about helping patients who qualify apply for and receive public assistance, working with patients to implement reasonable payment plans, offering discounts to under- and uninsured patients, etc.*

As we participate in Cover the Uninsured Week and National Hospital Week, we would like to say thank you to the men and women committed to quality care for all in **[OUR COMMUNITY]**.

In observance of Cover the Uninsured Week and National Hospital Week, we invite you to contact LOCAL Hospital at 555-555-5555 or visit the Web site at www.LOCALhospital.org for information about how you can volunteer to help bring quality health care to everyone.

How-to: Speakers Bureau

One way to **tell your story** in the community, without using the media, is to deliver it directly and in person, as a speaker or panelist at community groups' events.

Your hospital, board members and administrators play a unique role in the community and have unique relationships with third party groups. **Taking an inventory** of these groups and relationships could identify opportunities for you to reach out and offer speakers for meetings, luncheons or special events.

Some groups that may provide opportunities to **tell your story** might include:

- Business leaders
- The local Chamber of Commerce
- Community service organizations (Shriners, Kiwanis, Moose, Elks, etc.)
- Community social organizations
- Retirement communities
- Senior centers
- Community or civic centers
- Local health professionals associations
- Clergy groups

Once the groups and relationships for the hospital have been identified, **reach out to the groups through phone calls** from the hospital representative with the best relationship with that organization.

**Speaking Opportunity Outreach
Telephone Script**

Good morning/afternoon. This is [NAME] with LOCAL Hospital.

[Explain your relationship with the contact’s organization. Are you or the hospital a member? Do you regularly attend events? Did one of the hospital employees or volunteers tell you about the organization?]

People in our community have turned to LOCAL Hospital in times of illness for more than 50 years. Yet many people in our community don’t realize that, today, LOCAL provides so much more. LOCAL believes we have a special responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing of the community – both inside and outside our walls. That is why we are constantly working to identify unmet community needs and develop programs and services to address them.

For instance, [Talk briefly about local examples of preventive care, educational programs or charity work that might be of particular interest to members of the contact’s organization, such as free immunization services, traveling clinics, wellness classes, meals-on-wheels, etc.]

I’d like the opportunity to tell your members about our programs. Is this something you think they’d be interested in hearing about?

If yes:

Do you have an upcoming meeting or event that you’d like a presenter for?

If yes:

Thank you for your help! Let me get the details from you, and I’ll confirm with my schedule...

If no:

Can I send my contact information to you so that we may keep in touch for an event sometime in the future?

If no:

Thank you for your time. If you ever decide that this would be a helpful topic, please contact LOCAL Hospital and we’d be happy to send someone over.