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**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**  
**Department of Health and Community Services**  
**Budget 2008-09**

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## **COMMUNICATIONS ANALYSIS**

### **PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT**

- Issues related to health care have been prominent for the past several months, with ongoing attention by the media, general public, the Opposition and stakeholder groups.
- The most prominent issue that has created significant media and public attention are problems identified with Estrogen/Progesterone breast cancer testing (ER/PR). Public confidence in the health care system has most certainly been impacted.

### ***ER/PR Testing***

- With public hearings of the Commission of Inquiry underway, attention paid by the public, media and others has intensified.
- There has been substantial daily media coverage regionally and provincially, with coverage as well nationally.
- The first of the hearings saw testimony by patients and family members of those who are deceased – their stories were gripping and very poignant. Attention has since shifted to decisions around disclosure of information to the public, with a great proportion of commentary questioning whether or not information was deliberately withheld.
- The first government witness was former health minister Ottenheimer. The focus of media attention related to his testimony has been on who knew what and when, including Premier Williams and his staff.
- On April 7, 2008, in response to questions in the House of Assembly and in a media scrum, Premier Williams stressed that his government would never have sat on information it felt would have helped breast cancer patients. He also pointed out the misrepresentation of information related to evidence presented in hearings of the Commission of inquiry by the media and by the Opposition
- On April 1, the Opposition issued a news release with Leader Yvonne Jones stating that the government was continuing to deceive the public – Government's commitment to openness and accountability nothing more than a sham.
- A recent development concerning the discovery of additional government emails that will potentially serve as evidence at the inquiry has received significant attention in the public domain, with many questioning why these emails were not discovered earlier.
- This attention is expected to further intensify in the days to come, with further testimony scheduled from former Health minister Ottenheimer, former Health minister Osborne, the current Health minister, and former Eastern Health CEO George Tilley.
- On April 4, the results were displayed to a question posted on-line by CBC: Based on what

you know so far from the cancer inquiry, who do you think is to blame? 618 people responded in total - politicians & government (90) 15%, Eastern Health management (335) 54%, Medical and lab staff (76) 12%, and too early to say (117) 19%.

- Concerns have recently been voiced by both the general public, staff within the health sector, and individuals such as the executive director of the NLMA that the problems identified with ER/PR testing may be just the tip of the iceberg for problems in the health care system.
- During the week of March 31, 2008, two local doctors (Stone and Parfrey) commented separately in different media (Telegram, Open Line, Here and Now) on the need for perspective on the issues and the fact that there are lots of great things happening in health care every day. The validity of these comments were questioned in some cases, including by Open Line host Randy Simms and lawyer Ches Crosbie, who provided feedback to Here and Now and in a letter to the editor in the Telegram, that Dr. Parfrey's comments were not correct and that he was simply trying to defend Eastern Health.
- Concerns related to the recruitment and retention of pathologists have also been the subject of media stories in relation to ER/PR testing problems. On April 4, a front-page story in the Telegram "Poor Picture for Pathologists" highlighted the low pay and workload for pathologists in this province. While the article did note that such problems existed elsewhere within Canada, the primary content of the article painted a grim picture for NL.
- Concerns with pathology and lab testing were also the focus of a Globe and Mail story on March 16, 2008: Hospital labs need major fix. President of the Canadian Association of Pathologists said the problems experienced in this province and in New Brunswick, where authorities announced last month an inquiry and review of 24,000 pathology tests would take place, reflect systemic problems across the country.
- Another Globe story on March 15 focused on four patients from this province who have been impacted by the problems with ER/PR testing.
- A Bluebook commitment was made to "follow through on the task force on the management of adverse health events and the related dissemination of public information; and implement the pending recommendations of the judicial Commission of inquiry on estrogen and progesterone (ER/PR) testing for breast cancer".
- A recurring comment in the public domain by the leader of the NDP and others is that the health boards are too large and contribute to problems within the health care system, including the problems with ER/PR. This is despite the fact that problems with ER/PR testing began in 1997 and board restructuring occurred in 2005.

## **Target Audiences/Key Stakeholders**

### ***Internal***

- Premier's Office
- Cabinet Secretariat
- Communications Branch
- Cabinet
- MHAs
- Department of Health and Community Services
- Department of Transportation and Works (as per capital infrastructure)
- Department of Finance

### ***External***

- Regional Health Authorities
- Newfoundland and Labrador Health Boards Association
- Health care professionals –NLMA, AAHP, ARNNL, NLASW
- Memorial University Medical School
- Schools of Nursing
- Child and Youth Advocate
- Canadian Cancer Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Seniors, and those interested in seniors issues
- Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Personal Care Home owners/operators
- Provincial Wellness Advisory Council
- Unions – CUPE, NAPE, NLNU
- Professional Associations – Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador, NLNU, NLMA, Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers, etc.
- General public
- Media
- Opposition
- Other provinces
- Federal government

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