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Cornwall's Integrated Care Board is looking for a spin doctor. It seeks a Director of Engagement and Communications to combine engaging with patients and the public with 'reputation management'!

Dr Peter Levin (PhD)

AN OPEN LETTER TO KATE SHIELDS AND JOHN GOVETT

Dear Kate and John

I am troubled to learn that the Board of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care System, which you lead, is seeking to recruit someone to combine the role of 'reputation manager' – otherwise known as 'spin doctor' – with doing the job of communicating with patient groups and the public.

These are two incompatible tasks. Communicating with patient groups and the public requires a willingness to listen, tolerance of non-establishment views, an enquiring mind that is open to other people's ideas and capable of unbiased reasoning, and a commitment to discovering and upholding the public interest.

Reputation management, as we see from your job description, involves taking sides: deciding on the Board's behalf who the 'key stakeholders' are, 'campaigning' to promote your 'strategies', and ensuring that your 'core messages are targeted and well received'. None of these is consistent with engaging in any kind of partnership with patients and the public.

And as for giving the reputation manager responsibility for 'health and care citizen related research', as the job description says, that is not only misguided but plain laughable. Speaking as a researcher myself, with more than 50 years' experience, the last people to entrust with research management are spin doctors!

I wonder who has advised you to take this misguided step. Are you prepared to tell me?

Sincerely

Peter Levin

Dr Peter Levin (PhD)

APPENDIX

The [job description for the Director of Engagement and Communications](#) says:

The role is the senior strategic lead for communications, engagement and citizen experience for the integrated care board (ICB) and integrated care system (ICS) with regard to reputation management with key stakeholders (e.g executive and non-executive directors, media, MP's, councillors, partner organisations, the voluntary sector, patient representative groups, other influencers and opinion formers, unions/staff representatives and staff.

The role is expected to develop and execute both the ICB and ICS communication strategies and campaigns, working closely in partnership with our partner communications teams, the south west regional comms team and ICB citizen engagement, insights and digital team, to ensure the core messages are targeted and well received by our stakeholders.

The core role is acting as the ICB and ICS 'reputational guardian' and ensuring meaningful dialogue exists with key stakeholders.

To be the executive lead for NHS Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly ICB for; citizen and patient engagement, health and care citizen related research/insights, and citizen journey-mapping, that can help, advise and support our clinical service teams enhance our end-to-end patient pathways.

The main duties of the job will include:

To work alongside both the southwest regional comms director and system comms leads.

[To] develop, in collaboration, an inclusive ICB and ICS communications/PR strategies in response to our system's long-term plan (LTP) and consistent with the direction set by the Health and Wellbeing boards, the ICP/System Boards' direction.

[To] enact the ICB Board agreed comms strategy to deliver a "step change" in understanding across CloS key stakeholders of health and care issues (and solutions).

[To] influence local, regional, and national media, and opinion formers, and engage regionally and nationally to proactively promote best practice in help transformation our developments (*sic*).

[To] provide strategic communications/PR oversight of and support to nationally mandated, regional programmes to ensure delivery against agreed timescales and outcomes.

Acknowledgement: With thanks to [Cornwall Reports](#) for eagle-eyed ad spotting.