

**From:** Minh Alexander <\*\*\*\*\*>  
**Subject: National Guardian's Office Comms Strategy and Use of Social Media**  
**Date:** 9 October 2018 at 05:58:53 BST  
**To:** Henrietta Hughes <\*\*\*\*\* >

BY EMAIL

Dr Henrietta Hughes

National Freedom To Speak Up Guardian

Care Quality Commission

9 October 2018

Dear Henrietta,

**National Guardian's Office Comms Strategy and Use of Social Media**

You may recall that I wrote to your Office in February about these matters. I enquired but have not yet received a substantive response.

Another matter has arisen. A Freedom To Speak Up Guardian made the following public comment on twitter, to the husband of a healthcare whistleblower who has litigated:

['...a disclosure may have various themes but is still counted as one disclosure'](#)

This is incorrect as legally, each item of disclosure on any distinct theme is considered separately by the Employment Tribunal. Your Office stepped into the conversation and retweeted this Freedom To Speak Up Guardian, thereby implying that it supported her erroneous claim.

Your office did not respond [to a request from Mr Ward to either retract or substantiate its position.](#)

This family have suffered considerably and it would be fitting for the

National Guardian's Office to treat them with more respect and consideration.

This is not the first time an incident of this type has happened. I think if your Office posts information that is incorrect, either through original material or re-posting of other people's incorrect material, it should respond more appropriately to challenge. On this occasion the error was significant and I think the Office should retract and apologise, especially given its core mission and stated aims of encouraging adaptive system responses to challenge.

The incident also suggests that the training for Freedom To Speak Up Guardians may need to be reviewed.

I would be grateful for a response to the issues raised in my letter of 1 February 2018.

Best wishes,

Minh

Dr Minh Alexander

**From:** "Rogers, Gavin" <\*\*\*\*\*>  
**Subject:** RE: Comms strategy & membership of Advisory Group  
**Date:** 21 February 2018 at 10:14:30 GMT  
**To:** Minh Alexander <\*\*\*\*\* >  
**Cc:** Robert Francis <\*\*\*\*\*>, "Hughes, Henrietta"  
<\*\*\*\*\*>

Yes apologies for not responding sooner and thank you for your thoughts. We really appreciate the time you've taken to look at this document and you make some points that we would like to reflect on. We will therefore take some time to review the document and I will sure to get back to you sometime after our conference, which I am delighted to see you are able to attend.

Kind regards  
Gavin

**National Guardian  
Freedom to Speak Up**



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**From:** Minh Alexander [mailto:\*\*\*\*\* ]  
**Sent:** 20 February 2018 17:10  
**To:** Rogers, Gavin  
**Cc:** Robert Francis; Hughes, Henrietta  
**Subject:** Comms strategy & membership of Advisory Group

BY EMAIL

Gavin Rogers  
Communications and Engagement Manager  
National Guardian's Office  
Care Quality Commission

20 February 2018

Dear Gavin,

Please could you confirm receipt of my email of 1 February 2018 below.

Many thanks,

Minh

Dr Minh Alexander

**From:** Minh Alexander <\*\*\*\*\*>  
**Subject:** Comms strategy & membership of Advisory Group  
**Date:** 1 February 2018 at 07:27:44 GMT

**To:** Gavin Rogers  
**Cc:** Robert Francis, Henrietta Hughes <\*\*\*\*\*>

BY EMAIL

Gavin Rogers  
Communications and Engagement Manager  
National Guardian's Office  
Care Quality Commission

1 February 2018

Hi Gavin,

Thanks for sending through a copy of the 'National Guardian Social Media Handbook' as requested.

I was concerned to see that it is National Guardian policy to take discussions about 'negative comments' offline:

*"We use a three-step traffic light system when responding to a negative comment.*

*1. We will send a response that shows we're compassionate, informative and accessible.*

***2. If they continue, we will then offer to take it offline.***

*3. Anyone repeatedly engaging with us using abusive language or content after will be muted, blocked and in severe cases reported to Twitter where appropriate."*

<https://minhalexander.com/2018/01/31/the-national-freedom-to-speak-up-guardians-social-media-policy/>

Critical comments can be justified and useful, and if so, I see no reason

why they should not be openly discussed.

Indeed, if the National Guardian's Office seeks to be an exemplar of good whistleblowing governance, modelling mature and positive behaviour in response to critical feedback is surely a basic requirement for the Office.

I wonder if:

1) The National Guardian's Social Media Handbook could be amended so that:

- A more specific definition is given of the type of 'negative comments' that the Office will seek to take offline, so that it is clear that some critical comments *can* be discussed in public

- An explicit statement is added to the policy to the effect that the National Guardian's office will seek to model good governance in responding to critical feedback and accepts in principle that some criticism may be well founded

- The Office as a reflection of its independence does *not* as a matter of policy support the campaigns of other arms length bodies, and that it only specifically supports initiatives that may promote transparency and greater protection for whistleblowers.

I ask because it is currently stated in the handbook:

*"We will seek to use Twitter to further our engagement and communication activities, including....Working collaboratively with other ALBs and **supporting their campaigns**"*

I also ask, again with respect to maintaining the Office's strict independence, that the Office does not make claims that any initiatives are changing culture without evidence from rigorous, independent evaluation.

To give an example, I feel that the National Guardian's Office should not have tweeted:

"Dr Hughes attended the [#WRES](#) SAG meeting with [@yvonnecoghill1](#) and

@dianabelfon to learn about how the @WRES Team are changing the culture for #BME staff in the #NHS.”

This is because this tweet stated as fact that the WRES team is changing culture. Many BME staff feel that the WRES programme is *not* making an appreciable difference.

The current strength of feeling about the prosecution and striking off of a junior, female BME doctor is a testament to great uneasiness about serious, persisting racism in the NHS.

It is insensitive of white dominated NHS leadership to distribute cheerful messages that culture is changing in the face of such events.

2) I ask that the National Guardian publishes all her internal policies, including her (hopefully amended) National Guardian Social Policy Handbook. This would be helpful in setting an example on transparency.

Best wishes,

Dr Minh Alexander

cc Dr Henrietta Hughes, CQC National Freedom To Speak Guardian  
Sir Robert Francis, CQC NED and Chair of National Guardian's  
Accountability and Liaison Board

**From:** Minh Alexander <\*\*\*\*\*>

**Subject:** Comms strategy & membership of Advisory Group

**Date:** 14 January 2018 at 08:22:38 GMT

**To:** Jerina Brown \*\*\*\*\*

**Cc:** Henrietta Hughes <\*\*\*\*\*>

Hi Jerina,

1. Has the National Guardian's Office/ Will Flower prepared a comms strategy, and with respect to your new twitter account, a social media/ twitter strategy?

May I as a member of the advisory group see the relevant documents?

2. May I have a list of the members of the National Guardian's Advisory Group? It was agreed at the meeting on 3 November 2017 that this would be released as part of the meeting documentation, but it was not.

Many thanks and BW,

Minh

Dr Minh Alexander

cc Dr Henrietta Hughes National Freedom To Speak Up Guardian