

A to Z of Healthcare Communications Terms

An HCA Guide

Like many other industries, healthcare communications has an 'insiders language' all of its own. To give you a helping hand at the start of your healthcare communications career, or even as a handy refresher for those who have been in the industry for a bit longer, here is a handy reference guide which will equip you with some of the most common terms related to the medical, scientific, policy, marketing/PR and pharmaceutical disciplines.

ABPI	The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) is the trade association for companies in the UK producing prescription medicines.
Advocacy group	A term used for organisations which represent patients with particular conditions, for example people with cancer, women's health, arthritis. Usually registered charities or voluntary in nature.
ANR	Audio News Release. The audio equivalent of a written press release; audio recordings of interviews that a radio station can use to develop a radio news story or bulletin. ANRs can be provided as core material to radio stations to assist in securing radio coverage of a story.
Backgrounder	An in-depth document that is provided to journalists to help them write their story. A backgrounder normally accompanies a press release and provides contextual information about the story or the data.
Brief	The instructions from the 'client' to the PR agency including objectives, background information and envisioned output.
B-roll	A term used by TV broadcasters. B-roll is broadcast-quality TV footage that can be provided to a TV station for them to use in a news bulletin or TV programme about a story. B-roll comprises short sections of footage from which the TV station can select to create their own 'package' or version of your story.
Biography	Usually a brief synopsis of a person's credentials. Included in press packs to accompany press events, to provide a journalist with more information about the presenters or key opinion leaders at an event.
Broadcast media	A term used to define non-print media. Includes radio, TV and more recently, web and podcasting.
Brainstorm	Creative process where a group of individuals use creative processes to solve problems or generate ideas.
Boilerplate	Standard wording about the company or the product that usually appears near the end of all company-issued press releases.

Case study	A case study is a real life example which can bring to life the story you are trying to communicate. For instance, in trying to describe the impact of a particular disease, someone living with the condition is able to describe what it really means to them as an individual. Adds a strong human interest element to your communications.
Clinical trials	A clinical trial is a research study conducted on humans to assess the safety and efficacy of a medicine. Clinical trials on new medicines and sponsored by pharmaceutical companies can only be started after a compound has survived thorough pre-clinical development work, which involves laboratory testing.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development – affects members of professions whose institutes control qualifications and practice registration – particularly relevant to healthcare professionals. Most now apply systems of CPD which require members of that profession to show proof that their skills and knowledge are being updated and maintained and this is shown through the maintenance of a personal development plan and log.
Copy	Text or words. A term used by journalists to describe their work, and refer to their stories or features as ‘copy’; journalists also have ‘copy deadlines’, by when they need to have developed their copy / article.
Credentials	Either a published document or slide presentation a prospective PR agency will provide to a potential client. Credentials provide insight into the agencies capabilities, areas of expertise and experience, their history and heritage and personnel employed by the company.
Crisis management	Having a plan in place that can be effectively actioned when something goes wrong for an organisation.
Dateline	Stated at the top of the press release, the dateline is the city or town from which the news is coming, e.g. if your press release is coming from a congress in Denmark, your dateline might be Copenhagen. Some journalists may only cover stories from a particular area or dateline.
DTC	Direct to consumer communication. May also hear the acronym DTCa (direct to consumer advertising) or DTP (direct to patient, not desktop publishing!). In the UK, DTCa is not permitted, however the pharmaceutical industry does consider that all patients should have the right to truthful, accurate and easily understandable information that enables them, in consultation with their doctors, to make well-informed choices about their health.
Embargo	The date and time when a press release or item of information can be made publicly available. An embargo allows a press release to be made available to a journalist before the embargo lifts, this then allows a journalist to develop copy and make it available as soon as the embargo has lifted.

EMEA	The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is a decentralised body of the European Union with headquarters in London. Its main responsibility is the protection and promotion of public and animal health, through the evaluation and supervision of medicines for human and veterinary use. The EMA coordinates the evaluation and supervision of medicinal products throughout the European Union.
Evaluation	The continuous process of measuring the impact of a PR campaign or tactic. Evaluation should be an integral component of any PR campaign a PR agency recommends.
Exclusive	A news story offered exclusively to a single media outlet.
Features	A feature article is longer than a news item and explores a concept or idea more thoroughly, providing context. Feature articles in newspapers and magazines generally have longer lead times than news items.
FDA	The US Food and Drug Administration. The FDA is responsible for protecting the public health by assuring the safety, efficacy, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, medical devices, the nation's food supply, cosmetics, and products that emit radiation.
Generic drugs	An off-patent medicine. Until the patent expires, only the company that discovered a new medicine may produce it. After patent expiry, any company may produce the same generic compound.
GSL	General sales list medicines (GSL). A category of medicines which can be sold from any lockable shop (see also P, POM, OTC). P and GSL medicines may be promoted to the public.
KOLs	Key opinion leaders. Eminent individuals within their profession whom are regarded as influential among peers. KOLs are often quoted in press releases and offered to journalists for interview.
Key messages	Agreed words or statements for a target audience. Simplicity, clarity, interest and repetition of key messages will get the main points across to your target audience
Lobbying	Communications and liaison with legislators and government bodies.
Media coverage	Also known as 'press clippings'. The resulting stories or news articles that appear in media outlets as a result of your press release, PR tactics or campaigns.
MHRA	The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the government agency which is responsible for ensuring that medicines and medical devices work, and are acceptably safe. The MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health.
NICE	National Institute for Clinical Excellence – organisation that promotes clinical and cost effectiveness and produces and disseminates clinical guidelines.
Noise	A term used to describe confusion caused by too many messages or numerous media stories delivered at one time. In other words, random and competing messages that may interfere with your intended communication.
OTC	Over the counter. A medicine available without a prescription. Also see P, POM, GSL.

P	Medicines which can only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist in a pharmacy. Also see POM, GSL, OTC.
PAGB	The Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB) is the UK trade association for manufacturers of OTC medicines and food supplements.
PCT	Primary Care Trusts – these bodies are responsible for improving the health of the community, developing primary and community health services and commissioning secondary care services, although their remit is currently under revision.
Pitch	A term used to describe the process whereby a PR professional makes one-to-one telephone contact with a journalist to sell-in a story. The 'pitch' to the journalist sets out what the news is and a rationale as to why their readers will be interested in this story.
POM	Prescription only medicine. Cannot be dispensed by a pharmacy unless a qualified prescriber provides a prescription for the product. Also see P, GSL, OTC.
Press pack or kit	A pack of documents or materials provided to journalists, in one resource. A typical press pack or kit provided to journalists attending a press conference includes a press release, media backgrounders, references, case studies, and visuals to accompany a story or news item if appropriate.
Public affairs	The public policy aspect of public relations. The process of engaging with and communicating a point of view and messages to specific public sector audiences such as the government or governmental organisations.
Public relations	The management activity responsible for the creation of favourable attitudes amongst key audiences; getting the right message to the right people at the right time in the right format.
Press day	The day in the week (or the time of day) when a printed publication (e.g. a newspaper or weekly magazine) goes to print, therefore all copy must be filed (developed) before press day.
ROI	For a given use of money, the ROI (return on investment) is how much profit or cost saving is realised. An ROI calculation is sometimes used along with other approaches to develop a business case for a given proposal.
Sell-in	The process whereby a PR professional makes one-to-one telephone contact with a journalist to 'pitch' a story. The 'pitch' to the journalist sets out what the news is and a rationale as to why their readers will be interested in this story.
SIGN	The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). Responsible for the development and dissemination of national clinical guidelines containing recommendations for effective practice based on current evidence.
SMC	The remit of the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) is to provide advice to NHS Boards and their Area Drug and Therapeutics Committees (ADTCs) across Scotland about the status of all newly licensed medicines, all new formulations of existing medicines and any major new indications for established products.

Target audience	The key publics or stakeholders with whom you wish to communicate. Target audiences can be external audiences (such as customers, payers, media, competitors, analysts, investors, share holders, local communities) or internal audiences.
Trade media / publication	The media published for and read by a specific industry or specialism, e.g. general hospital media read by secondary care physicians is described as trade media for this type of physician.
VNR	Video News Release. The television equivalent to a written press release. A VNR comprises two components, A-roll and B-roll. A-roll is a short package of video footage lasting approximately three minutes which tells the 'complete' story. Also see B-roll.

Further resources

NHS terminology/ acronyms

www.tin.nhs.uk/a-z-jargon-buster

www.nhsinherts.nhs.uk/hp/glossary.htm

Pharmaceutical industry terms

www.breakthroughlive.co.uk/glossaryofterms.cfm

PR jargon buster

www.ipr.org.uk/direct/looking.asp?v1=jargon

Marketing terms

www.cim.co.uk/cim/ser/html/infQuiGlo.cfm

[Medical profession acronyms](#)

www.trentdeanery.nottingham.ac.uk/gen_acronym.htm

Clinical trials

www.ir2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/glossary.htm