HMS
HEALTHCARE MARKETING STRATEGY

Hospital PR Playbook

How a hospital earns trust, handles a crisis and protects its reputation, inside the NMC advertising rules.

Akhil Dave
Founder, HMS Consultants
Edition 1, 13 November 2026



Six functions. One crisis protocol. A 90-day plan.

Inside this playbook

Hospital PR in one page 3

PR is not only reactive 4

Six core functions 5

Patient communication and media 6

Crisis communication: the rules 7

The first 24 hours 8

Your crisis protocol 9

Internal communication 10

Community outreach, the NMC-safe way 11

Digital reputation 12

PR and marketing together 13

NMC rules for hospital PR 14

The PR readiness scorecard 15

The 90-day PR plan 16

Get a PR plan built 17

Sources and disclaimer 18

Hospital PR in one page.

Public relations in a hospital is the planned way it communicates with patients, families, staff, media, the community and government bodies, to build credibility and protect its reputation.

> **Advertising tells people what a hospital wants them to believe. PR is what they believe when the hospital is silent.**
>
> HMS view

	Advertising	PR
Source	Paid, controlled	Earned through consistency
Speed	Immediate, short-lived	Slower, more durable
Builds	Awareness	Trust and referrals
Reaches	New patients	Existing patients, families, referrers
NMC angle	Tightly restricted (Para 8.1)	Education and public-health talks allowed (Paras 5.1, 8.2(iii))

HMS Prescription

Write one sentence: who in your hospital owns communication today? If the answer is 'everyone', the answer is 'no one'.

PR is not only reactive.

Most hospitals notice PR when a complaint, bad review or media query lands. By then the options are fewer.

Reactive PR	Planned PR
Starts after a complaint or negative story	Clear owner and written protocol
Late and inconsistent replies	Fast, factual first response
Several voices, several versions	One authorised spokesperson
Staff learn from the news	Staff briefed before the public

Why it matters more in India

- Patient literacy varies widely, so clarity matters more than polish.
- Decisions are family-led. Families talk, and compare.
- Trust in hospitals sits beside doubt about commercial motives.
- One experience shared on WhatsApp or Google Maps can reach thousands within hours.

HMS Prescription

List the last three complaints or reviews that surprised leadership. For each, ask: who knew first, and what did we say?

The six core functions.

1. **Patient and community communication**
2. **Media relations**
3. **Crisis communication**
4. **Internal communication**
5. **Community outreach and health awareness**
6. **Digital reputation**

Who owns what

Function	Owner	Cadence
Patient communication	Patient experience lead	Daily
Media relations	One authorised contact	Monthly
Crisis	CEO or medical director	On call, drill twice a year
Internal	HR with marketing	Monthly
Community	Marketing owner	Quarterly
Digital reputation	Patient experience lead	Weekly

Rx

HMS Prescription

Write a name beside each of the six functions. One name per row.

Patient communication and media.

Patients and families

- ✓ Tell families what will happen next, and when. Silence creates anxiety.
- ✓ Explain delays at the desk before they become complaints.
- ✓ Give one named contact for each admitted patient.
- ✗ Never discuss a patient's identity or details on a public channel.
  Para 7.4

Media

- ✓ One authorised person handles every media query.
- ✓ Share public-health information, clinical milestones and awareness campaigns with journalists. Keep them educational.
  Paras 5.1, 8.2(iii)
- ✗ Do not use media coverage as a way to solicit patients or compare yourself favourably.
  Para 8.1(ii), (ix)
- ? A doctor quoted in the media. The guidelines do not detail every format. Keep to education, show name and registration, and avoid claims.
  Para 3.2

Rx HMS Prescription

Write the media policy in five lines: who speaks, who approves, how fast we reply, what we never say.

Crisis communication: the rules.

Every hospital of meaningful size will face a crisis: an error, a public complaint, a staff incident or a regulatory issue. The first 24 to 48 hours decide how it ends.

- **Respond early with facts,** even if incomplete. Silence is read as guilt.
- **One spokesperson.** Several voices amplify damage.
- **Acknowledge families first,** then explain the institution's position.
- **Tell staff before the news breaks.** They are your first audience.
- **Follow up.** One statement is never enough.

- Do not argue facts in public with a family or reviewer.
- Do not release patient details to defend the hospital.

  Para 7.4

> **A crisis does not create a PR problem. It reveals whether you had a PR strategy.**
>
> HMS view

Rx

HMS Prescription

Ask three leaders: if a serious complaint went public today, who speaks, and what do they say? If the answers differ, you have found the gap.

The first 24 hours.

A simple timeline. HMS practice, not an NMC requirement.

0-2 hrs

Confirm facts

Gather what is known. Inform the CEO and medical director. Do not guess.

2-4 hrs

Brief the team

Inform staff, security and front desk. Give them one line to use.

4-8 hrs

First statement

Short, factual, human. Acknowledge, state what is known, say what happens next.

8-24 hrs

Meet the family

Senior person, private setting. Listen first.

24-48 hrs

Update

Share verified progress. Correct errors calmly.

Day 3+

Learn

Write what happened, what changed, who owns the fix.

Rx

HMS Prescription

Print this timeline. Fill in the name of the person who owns each row.

Your crisis protocol on one page.

Item	Fill in
Crisis lead	_____
Spokesperson and deputy	_____
Medical and legal advisers	_____
Staff briefing owner	_____
Escalation: who is called, in what order	_____
Approved channels	Website notice, one WhatsApp line, media note

Holding statement (edit to fit)

"We are aware of [the matter]. Our first concern is the patient and the family. We are reviewing the facts and will share verified information by [time]. Please contact [name, phone] for updates."

Never name or describe a patient without lawful basis and consent.
Para 7.4

Statements about a medical outcome need medical and legal review before release. Take written legal advice for your institution.

HMS Prescription

Fill the table. Run a 30-minute drill with the people named.

Internal communication.

Staff are the face patients meet. If they learn about hospital news from the public, trust at the bedside drops.

- ✓ Brief staff before any public announcement.
- ✓ Give front-desk, nursing and security a single approved line for sensitive topics.
- ✓ Share monthly updates: what is new, what we said publicly, what we expect from you.
- ✓ Make doctors aware of the NMC rules for their own posts and profiles.
  Para 4.4
- ✗ Do not ask staff to post reviews, endorsements or promotional content.
  Paras 8.1(xi), Expl. V

Monthly staff brief (template)

One page, every month

1. What changed in the hospital
2. What we said publicly this month
3. One patient-experience win (anonymous)
4. One thing we must do better
5. Who to contact for media or social queries

Rx HMS Prescription

Send the first monthly brief this month. Keep it to one page.

Community outreach, the NMC-safe way.

Official text | **Para 5.1** | **Para 8.2(iii)** | **Para 8.1(x)**

✓ Public-health talks, school sessions and awareness drives that educate.
Para 8.2(iii)

✓ Educational content for awareness days, in plain words.
Para 5.1

✓ Document every activity: date, topic, who spoke, how many attended. Keep it private.

✗ No offers, discounts or inducements to attend.
Para 8.1(x)

✗ No promotion of your hospital or doctors as better than others.
Para 8.1(ix)

? Free health camps. The guidelines do not settle every case. Keep the camp educational, avoid inducements, and take legal advice.
Para 8.1(x)

Outreach builds trust before anyone needs to book.

See the HMS Health Awareness Camp Playbook for a full plan.

Rx

HMS Prescription

Choose one community activity for next quarter. Write its educational topic and its owner.

Digital reputation.

Google ratings, reviews and social media are now primary inputs in patient decisions. Treat them as part of PR.

- ✓ Reply to every review politely, without clinical details.
  Para 7.4
- ✓ Fix the problem the review reveals. Log the fix.
- ✓ Keep your Google profile accurate and complete.
- ✗ Do not solicit, incentivise, buy or showcase reviews in promotion.
  Para 8.1(xi); Expl. V
- ? A patient's own unsolicited review on Google. The text does not clearly address it. HMS advice: do not reproduce or showcase it in promotion.
  Expl. V

Reply template: negative review

"Thank you for telling us. We are sorry your experience fell short. We would like to understand more. Please contact [name] at [number] so we can look into it."
No names, no diagnosis, no argument.

Rx HMS Prescription

Reply to the oldest unanswered review today, using the template.

PR and marketing, working together.

PR builds trust → **Marketing earns attention** → **Patients believe and book**

Marketing without PR builds on unstable ground.

Moment	PR does	Marketing does
New department	Briefs staff, doctors and media	Updates site and Google profile with facts
Awareness day	Plans outreach and partners	Publishes educational content
Complaint	Responds, fixes, learns	Pauses promotion on the issue
Quarter review	Reports sentiment and themes	Reports enquiries and appointments

HMS Prescription

Hold one joint 30-minute meeting between PR and marketing owners each month.

NMC rules for hospital PR.

The guidelines of 6 October 2026 cover hospitals and medical institutions as well as doctors.

Allowed

- Educational content
  Para 5.1
- Public-health talks and lectures
  Para 8.2(iii)
- Factual announcements of address, timings, fees
  Paras 8.2(ii), 9.3
- Credentials and registration shown
  Para 3.2, Expl. III

Not allowed

- Soliciting patients directly or through others
  Para 8.1(ii), (xi)
- Testimonials and success claims
  Para 8.1(iii), (xi)
- Superlatives such as best or No. 1
  Para 8.1(ix)
- Offers and inducements
  Para 8.1(x)
- Identifiable patients
  Para 7.4

You are responsible for what is authorised or sponsored in your name, including agencies and press-release writers.
Para 4.4

Media interviews and press releases are not detailed in the paragraphs HMS has relied on. Keep them educational, factual, and reviewed by a doctor and legal adviser.

Rx HMS Prescription

Add a 3-point check to your press-release process: educates, no claim, no patient identity.

The PR readiness scorecard.

Score 0 (no), 1 (partly), 2 (yes, with proof). Total out of 20.

	Check	Score
1	One person is responsible for hospital communication	0 1 2
2	Patient complaints are acknowledged within 24 hours	0 1 2
3	Front desk knows how to explain delays	0 1 2
4	Every Google review gets a reply within 48 hours	0 1 2
5	A written crisis protocol exists, with a named spokesperson	0 1 2
6	Media queries go to one authorised person	0 1 2
7	Doctors and staff are briefed before public announcements	0 1 2
8	Community activities are documented	0 1 2
9	Press and social content is reviewed against the NMC rules	0 1 2
10	Monthly review of complaints, reviews and themes happens	0 1 2

0 to 6
Start here. Fix the basics.

7 to 13
Tighten the gaps.

14 to 20
Strong. Keep a dated record.

The 90-day PR plan.

30	**Days 1 to 30: Foundation** Name the PR owner. Write the crisis protocol. Appoint one media contact. Reply to all open reviews. Run the scorecard.
60	**Days 31 to 60: Systems** Monthly staff brief. Complaint log with 24-hour acknowledgement. First community activity planned, educational only.
90	**Days 61 to 90: Credibility** Run a crisis drill. Share one public-health talk. Review themes with leadership. Re-score.

Review monthly

Measure	Source
Complaints, and time to first reply	Complaint log
Average rating and new reviews	Google
Media queries handled	Media log
Community activities held	Activity log

HMS Prescription

Book the day-30, day-60 and day-90 reviews now. Invite the leaders named in your protocol.

Get a PR plan built

Want a PR and reputation plan for your hospital?

HMS Reputation Management helps hospitals build review handling, patient communication and a crisis-ready PR system within the NMC guidelines.

Reputation Management	**hmsconsultants.in/services/reputation-management**
Call or WhatsApp	**+91 81550 04010**
Email	**info@hmsconsultants.in**
Website	**hmsconsultants.in**

About the author

Akhil Dave is an ethical healthcare marketing strategist, consultant and mentor with 25+ years in healthcare marketing, including senior hospital roles. He is the founder of HMS Consultants, and is known as The White Shirt Man.

HMS Consultants is a healthcare marketing consultancy, not a law firm or crisis-litigation adviser. This guide is not legal advice.

> **Knowing is Knowing, Doing is Doing™**

Sources and disclaimer.

Primary text

NMC Ethics and Medical Registration Board, Public Notice No. R-13014/01/2024-Ethics, 6 October 2026: *Guidelines on Ethical Advertising and Public Communication by Hospitals/Medical Institutions and Registered Medical Practitioners*. Paragraph numbers refer to it. The text was read from the copy published by Medical Dialogues.

medicaldialogues.in/pdf_upload/2026/10/07/nmc-guidelines-on-ethical-advertising-and-public-communication-478642.pdf

Related HMS guides

Hospital Marketing Audit Checklist. NMC Compliance Guide for Doctors. Public Relations in a Hospital (HMS blog). hmsconsultants.in/blog

How to use this guide

The guidance is HMS's practical advice from its hospital work. Items marked HMS view or grey area are not NMC positions. Where the guidelines are silent, HMS suggests the cautious reading.

Disclaimer

This guide is general information. It is not legal advice, and HMS Consultants is not a law firm. The NMC may issue clarifications. Take legal advice on your specific content and arrangements. Edition 1, 13 November 2026.

© 2026 HMS Advisors Pvt Ltd. All rights reserved. hmsconsultants.in