

# Spreading the Word: the media and crime reduction

The security team of King's College Hospital were the subject of *Casualty Cops*, a *Cutting Edge* documentary broadcast on Channel Four in November 2000. **Chris Doherty**, Head of Site Services at King's, helped manage access for the film crew. His experience convinced him that the media can play a positive role in disseminating good crime prevention practice.

**K**ing's College Hospital NHS Trust is a major London teaching hospital with over 4000 staff and about 500,000 patients a year. We serve the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. This large campus was once plagued by crime and violence, not least in the Accident & Emergency department, where 999 calls to the police were commonplace. The security team which then served the Trust were almost wholly dependent on the police when violence arose. The gangs which roamed around our hospital at night contributed to a culture of fear amongst Trust staff, 70 per cent of whom are women. In one year (1994) there were 65 burglaries of outpatient and administrative areas, and dozens of alarms requiring police response.

## Improved security

Since then King's has accepted responsibility for its security and invested considerable resources in hardware, and in recruiting and training staff. The

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high quality of our security staff has been the critical component in tackling the culture of violence, crime and the fear of crime on our campus. Security staff undergo a rigorous selection process, informed by equal opportunities, and are assessed on physical fitness, literacy, computer aptitudes and interpersonal skills. The selection panel includes representatives of the service's principal 'customers' - senior nursing staff who rely upon a prompt and professional response to incidents. Progression through the pay scale is contingent upon undertaking further training. The result is a diverse and intelligent team who are more than capable of handling the range of extremely sensitive situations they are presented with daily.

Larger staff teams (six per shift on the main campus) means that the Trust can deal with 70 per cent of incidents on site without involving the

police. Their work is underpinned, as *Casualty Cops* showed, by a Control Room, alarm systems and a 112 camera CCTV system. The team respond to 100 per cent of alarm activations so we are no longer a drain on police resources. We have practically eliminated car and street crime on our core campus.

If a nurse feels threatened in our A&E he or she can pull a personal alarm which pinpoints their location and triggers the immediate response of the whole security team. The control room operator will also start a live CCTV recording of the incident to be provided as evidence if necessary. In the last twelve months we have provided 89 CCTV tapes to the police and seen 15 convictions for offences on our sites. The underlying incidence of violence remains but incidents are shorter and those who assault our staff are almost certain to be detained until the police arrive. This has really improved the working lives of our staff. Staff on one ward recently nominated the security service for an internal award, describing the service as:

"Impressive and reliable service when difficult situations arise ...prompt and polite and able to diffuse situations which have involved troubled individuals. They are particularly valued for standing back and taking their lead from those already on the scene, for restoring calm just by their considerate manner".

## The NHS plan and zero tolerance

Both The NHS plan and the NHS Zero Tolerance campaign, which cites King's as a model of good security practice, place staff safety at the centre of the national agenda and are paving the way for violence prevention. The security service is participating with clinicians, nurses, receptionists and managers in developing improved risk assessments and preventative measures. A promising example is improved waiting time information for A&E patients and a direct phone link to NHS Direct. We are also developing a range of measures to deal with repeat offenders such as contracts of behaviour, warning letters and even Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

The relationship with the local police has also changed from almost mutual antagonism to mutual respect. We are now working with the police on a number of joint initiatives including a positive arrest



protocol for those who assault our staff and the creation of a unit here for patients under armed guard. We are working with HMP Brixton staff on a protocol for 'bedwatch' at King's. We are also working with local authorities – a good example is our involvement with Southwark Council's CCTV scheme and Shopwatch radiolink in our local area. We are also developing links with the community and aim to create, with Lambeth police, a Kingswatch scheme this year for local colleges, businesses and residents. There are many challenges remaining, not least a rise in street crime on our outer campus and surrounding areas that correlates with Lambeth's reported trend. We continue to examine incidents and promote schemes to prevent them.

### **The role of the media**

Improved relations with Trust staff and with external partners are helping us improve the safety atmosphere at King's. We feel that what we are doing is a message worth communicating and that the media can help us reach a much wider audience — including our staff and potential staff, our NHS and Department of Health colleagues, our local community and partners such as the Metropolitan Police Service. We want them to know about our professional security service, the investment in hardware and our determination to tackle people who assault or abuse our staff.

Working with October Films required careful management: Trust staff needed to feel confident

that their professional duty of confidentiality to patients and relatives would not be compromised. The reputation of the Trust had to be weighed in the balance with the producers' desire to make a documentary with a strong narrative interest and which accurately portrayed the difficult situations health service staff face.

Our commitment to the Casualty Cops project has been rewarded by the interest in our service it has promoted, principally, I believe, because not all hospitals are so well provided. The queues of NHS staff wanting to visit King's has grown since the programme was broadcast and they are keen to learn from our experience. Casualty Cops has helped promote a debate about how security services are provided in the NHS and shown how well it can be done with the right balance of staff and hardware. We believe this is an excellent example of how positive media coverage can help spread good crime reduction practices.

*Chris Doherty is Site Services Manager at King's College Hospital in London.*