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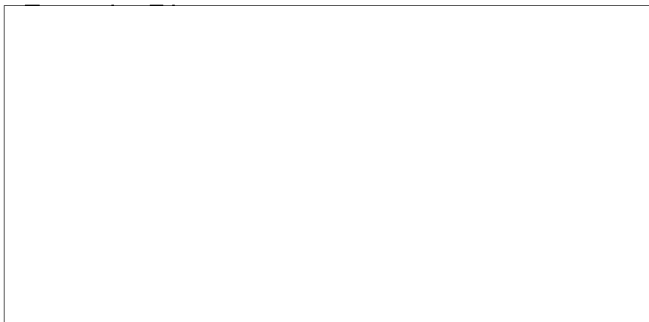
From: Pedro Delgado [redacted]
Sent: 25 July 2011 21:13
To: Rebecca Hales
Subject: Response
Attachments: PCC response 25 July 2011.docx

Dear Rebecca,

Please find attached my response, and feel free to share this as deemed relevant.

Kind regards,
Pedro

Pedro Delgado



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Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for your communication of Tuesday 19th July. I share the view that this matter needs Press Complaints Commission resolution sooner rather than later.

I am disappointed by the attitude of The Irish News. It had established a reputation for more respected values and an ethos that reflected its awareness of the responsibilities of the modern media. However, the subtext to today's journalism at national and local levels is the circulation war and the integrity and reputation of individuals is often the first casualty. I have found the Editor arrogant and complacent and the journalist who put together the tendentious memo to her Editor to be partial and self justifying. There was a conspicuous element of hubris in their reaction. My own correspondence with the journalist reflects openness and honesty and a lack of awareness of the agenda that was being pursued. The reason, of course, was that it did not even occur to me that my work in patient safety could be presented in such a misleading way, by a newspaper bound by a published code of self regulation (see below).

I have set down the truth below with clarity and rigour in regard to the facts. Reading their correspondence brought to my mind Huxley's celebrated remark that "facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored".

Let me state unequivocally that the protracted article and its presentation over a number of pages, without justification, gave the unambiguous impression that I had been guilty of profligacy and was self serving in regard to the use of public money. This is deeply misleading and a contrived distortion of the facts.

Those facts are as follows.

Rather than offer balance and objectivity, the article traded on the perception (as we all know, it is the perception rather than the reality upon which judgements are made) that attendance at training and conferences is an unjustified round of enjoyable vacations to foreign parts. The reality is that the programmes brought me away from my wife and young child, were challenging, intensive and time consuming and at times profoundly inconvenient. In fairness, there is truth in the view that some public servants attend what are deemed to be professional development conferences that are structured around social occasions as much as intensive study and development. Where this article went wrong was to strive to associate my work with this practice where it was not appropriate.

The tabloid language and the photographic support perpetuated this fallacy. A (large) photograph (on the front page no less) showed me shirtless and in a Mediterranean setting in a disingenuous attempt to support the myth. The photograph (one of three used to sensationalise the matter) was actually taken on a family holiday and was cut by The Irish News to remove the image of one of my children. To say that this was done to protect the child (from what?) is deeply

dishonest and an affront to any semblance of journalistic ethics. The claim that the recreational image had no link to the implications of the article is laughable and epitomises the evasive attitude of The Irish News to my complaints.

This was a wilful breach of the PCC assertion that “Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life...” Am I to believe with any seriousness that this conduct was above “the benchmark for those ethical standards” of journalism, if I may again borrow from the words of the PCC itself?

The large bold headline on the front page referred to me pejoratively as “a Boss” (“The NHS Boss who travelled the world at your expense”) to maintain the illusion, whereas I had no staff whatever and no responsibilities of this kind. This is dishonourable journalism. The truth is that rather than being one of the public servants who attend conferences which are not always relevant or necessary, my actual and only professional function was to study international best practice in relevant disciplines and disseminate this to enhance performance. Another gross inaccuracy once again serves to provide support for the contrived headline. Contrary to the title of the article suggesting ‘*at your expense*’, they were informed that over 50% of the funds they quoted came from a Foundation in London, which provided funding linked to professional development for the initial stages of the Forum.

The consequence of my work was to reduce harm, save lives and by direct association public money but nowhere did this find a place in the reporting at the cost of any attempt at balance. Quite simply, in their crusade to excoriate those who are guilty of waste, they ruthlessly and without regard to my professional role, reputation and integrity, all of which were deeply and publicly damaged, used me as a scapegoat by artfully dissembling to fit the theme of their campaign.

Is this how the PCC instruction that the “agreed code be honoured not only to the letter but in the *full spirit*” is interpreted by The Irish News in its journalism?

The newspaper takes pains to assert that they reported that my visits had been approved by my superior colleagues. This is a red herring when measured against the prominent photographs and headlines and tone of the articles that have done me so much damage and created a clearly constructed impression of foreign junketing rather than the truth of my particular (and very singular) role in the public sector.

It is relevant at this point to note the traumatic (I am not given to melodramatic statements) impact of this extraordinarily protracted article upon my wife and family. Another deeply misleading assertion was that I was a high profile individual in the community. They cited the fact that I played football. Let me put on the record that I had no profile of any kind and this was a further attempt at deceitful manipulation of the reality to justify the articles. Northern Ireland has a population of 1.7 million and I doubt if a handful of people know of my existence. I played football part-time and in my professional post there was no public image of any kind. The journalist’s

reference to me as “a public figure” in her memo to her Editor is preposterous and is indicative of the attempts to give a semblance of public interest to these undistinguished pieces of work. Like “the Boss” headline, this was grossly inaccurate. Indeed, my wife has a prominent professional role in the largest university on the island of Ireland and her profile would be higher than my own because of the size of the staff and student community of which she is a part, some 30,000 people. This served to make the articles deeply embarrassing to her and they have had a detrimental effect upon her health. Perhaps The Irish News would see this as merely a marginal collateral cost to their circulation seeking and pseudo evangelical reportage.

The newspaper also took pains to record that I was now employed by one of the organisations with which I had worked in my professional role. I am deeply interested in (and somewhat confused about) the inference of this remark. Is it another attempt to imply misuse of public funds? Is this to infer that I abused my position for personal gain? Both implied allegations (what else are they?) are spurious and untrue and again are a flagrant attempt to stubbornly pursue a meretricious agenda, irrespective of truth.

When I hear the ‘public interest’ cited, my suspicions are aroused, at least in the first instance. The subtexts are the circulation war, readership numbers and the crucial link to advertising. Today’s news agenda is pursued in a very ruthless and predatory operating environment and for that reason the vigilant monitoring by the PCC and its standards of regulation are essential.

If what I have said so far does not demonstrate a serious breach of the PCC Editors’ Code, then I despair of the future of ethical journalism. The offer of publishing a letter from me is risible for a number of reasons. Only one of these is the fact that the article was spread over a number of pages and included the entire front page where my photograph looked out from every newsstand in Northern Ireland and through modern technology in other parts of the world.

Fairness and truth demand, inter alia, a prominent and unequivocal apology, which is why I have chosen the Press Complaints Commission rather than expensive litigation. Injunctions and super-injunctions are merely devices for the rich. Justice demands that the redress be proportionate to the damage and indeed, even an apology would not be adequate at this stage but it would at least serve to repair something of what was done. For that reason, I am also asking that the other relevant sanctions as published by the Press Complaints Commission, be considered to ensure that no one else in this community suffers as I have by such poor and irresponsible journalism and cavalier disregard for balance.

We live in a democratic society and I am of the view that freedom of the press is critical to the preservation of our society and its values. I also take the view that investigative journalism has an important role to play in this process. However, that

can only be on the basis of balanced reporting and rigorous presentation of all the facts. I quote once more from the Press Complaints Commission Editors' Code of Practice: "The Press, whilst free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact". This is a test case in such a failure.

In summary, I feel that I have been tried and found guilty by a kangaroo court of the press and I remain at a complete loss to understand what I have done to have my reputation publicly destroyed. Consequently, I would like the treatment of this matter by The Irish News to be subject to the court of their peers, so to speak, the Press Complaints Commission. I am confident that this would be done with a view to balance and the truth and above all, with the fairness and rigour that was missing throughout these pieces of irresponsible reportage.