

dear residents

The Communication Conundrum

August 18, 2024

Dear Residents,

It is August and it is really hot! I hope everyone is paying attention to hydration and exercising wisely. I still see a lot of runners out there and worry about them. During my time on Clements wards, I've noticed a few trends. One that stands out is the now rare sound of pagers going off. It seems Epic Chat has largely taken over, streamlining team communication in a significant way. However, with this convenience comes an expectation of immediate response, much like a page. In the past, paging someone required waiting by the phone, adding a potential impediment. But now, with mobile phones everywhere, the pressure to respond instantly is stronger. The advantage of secure chat is clear—it allows us to discuss patients while maintaining privacy and information security. Yet, as with email, the ease of initiating and adding others to a chat can quickly escalate into a "reply all" situation, as many of us have experienced.

Most of our communication platforms have started with good intentions, but over time, their utility begins to drop. In the mail that arrives at my doorstep - there are only one or two things that are of value, buried within grocery store coupons and marketing materials. My home phone (yes, I still have a landline) is designed to go straight to voicemail. For my personal email, I have had to set up several filters and I engage in very active junk mail management. The problem with all communication systems is that they are fully open, and because anyone can reach you, bad messages crowd out the good ones. We can also hide behind electronic evidence that we communicated something important to you even though we fully know that useful communication is deeply buried in the useless garbage that arrives with the same expediency in your inbox. This problem was humorously highlighted [in a GomerBlog](#) post.



Day 276: After sending out that message in a bottle stating my location, I've been bombarded with junk mail."

In the education office, we are committed to responding to emails within one business day (often sooner). Instead of crowding your inbox with multiple informational items, the chief residents consolidate these in our weekly Resident Digest. The Department of Medicine has a very engaging [news portal](#). We are always seeking content and would love to include your materials.

When things go wrong, and we feel we lack the necessary information to understand the information or weren't adequately consulted before a decision was made, it's common to blame "poor communication." However, this phrase often serves as a scapegoat for deeper, more complex issues. We all understand what effective communication looks like, drawing on [Aristotle's three elements](#)—ethos, pathos, and logos (credibility, emotional connection, and logical appeal). When we attribute failure to "poor communication," it might actually reflect a deeper disconnect with the underlying mission or strategy of the organization. In essence, when we don't fully understand the goals or strategies at play, we're quick to [blame communication](#), even though the root cause may lie elsewhere.

Organizations often respond by ramping up communication through the same channels, in the same direction—from them to us. But maybe what we need is more communication in the opposite direction—more listening, rather than just speaking. The weekly wellbeing fuel gauge was a breakthrough of sorts when it was launched several years ago. I think we may need even more avenues to actively listen to you and put an end to the feeling of "poor communication."

Send me your thoughts (about anything!)

Dino Kazi