

- **BLACKS SUPPORT HEALTH EDUCATION** One significant difference among public respondents is that black Americans would spend the greatest portion of healthcare resources on health education.

Hospital is doing a follow-up Delphi study of medical experts' opinions on healthcare reform, "particularly the ethical issues." Due to be completed by the end of June. "We're hoping the Delphi can be used by Congress as it wrestles with healthcare reform." (More info from Gelbart at P.O. Box 2071, Phoenix 85001-2071; 602/285-3054)

✓ "CHURNING" IS "WORRISOME" TREND IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS : STUDY

Part two of Foundation for Public Affairs' survey results (pr 1/11) sees a phenomenon Ray Hoewing (Public Affairs Council pres) calls "churning" -- a combination of cutbacks, turnovers, feelings of job insecurity, stress & dissatisfaction with the overall working environment for all levels of pa pros. 1/3rd of respondents had staff reductions during the last 3 years. Other findings from survey's open-ended questions:

Consolidation of functions is most frequently mentioned as the most significant change. Most mentioned among these is merger of communications with pa staff. Also, new or enhanced communication responsibilities -- e.g., financial, crisis, strategic communications.

Inadequate resources is identified as the "greatest internal challenge." Next most frequently mentioned: a) the growing complexity of addressing issues within a highly decentralized organization & b) coordinating with other key departments or functions.

Regulatory concerns are the "greatest external challenge." Pressure to place new controls at federal & state levels is escalating. (More from PAC, 1019 Nineteenth st, NW, Wash DC 20036)

✓ USING DATABASES FOR RESEARCH SAVES TIME, UP TO 64%

Finds a survey done for NEXIS. Electronic information retrieval services were found to produce great overall time savings in collecting information for client projects & new business development. Study compared NEXIS to both manual research & a composite of other electronic search services. An average research task, on which participants spent 105 minutes when done manually, was accomplished in 38 minutes using NEXIS. NEXIS searches material from 750 full-text business & news sources & 4,000 databases.

"NEXIS is like breathing. If you don't breathe, you don't live. If you don't have NEXIS, you don't have a database. It's really that important," Lou Williams, L.C. Williams & Assocs (Chi), told pr. **"I'm surprised the time savings is that low.** I can't conceive of doing research any other way.

"You'd have to go to the library, physically go thru the microfiche. It gives me the chills to think about doing it the way we used to do it. For public relations practitioners it is the single-most valuable secondary information tool we have available to us. There are other options, but over all nobody else comes close to NEXIS."

✓ CLINTON GROUP'S 1ST "REFORM": KILL PR IN DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE

Without warning even to agency heads in his department, Agriculture Sec'y Mike Espy announced at a press conference Thursday, Feb 11, this program for "what Pres. Clinton & I have in mind when we say we want to give this gov't back to the people":

- Eliminate the single lunchroom table reserved for the Sec'y
- Open door policy to his office for employees & "all Americans"
- "People...should send me their opinions typed, handwritten or crayoned...faxed, mailed or carrier-pigeoned...& I will get the message"
- "The new USDA will replace the old, bureaucratic, duplicative Office of Public Affairs with one, new, streamlined & efficient Office of Communications"

APPARENT INTENT OF MOVE RAISES MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

1. He said there are currently 1,000 people in pa/info jobs -- 450 in 25 scattered offices in DC, the rest "stationed at regional, state & national forest offices -- yet only 156 report to the centralized, departmentwide Office of PA. USDA does not need 1,000 staffers assigned to telling the public what a great job we are doing" but does need more providing "direct services." "We should be about serving the public...not about promoting ourselves," Espy said -- and then praised the pa staff for "fine work" under hard, stressful conditions with little pay or recognition.

Is providing information, assisting the agency's clients & building relationships with the very groups he wants to come to his "open door" NOT serving the public? 600+ of the total are in the Forest Service -- which has been building a highly professional pr staff for years. Could the Clinton team, or Espy, simply misunderstand what pr does?

2. Division chiefs in the PA Office will now report directly to the new Dir of Comms "and to his or her Deputy Directors" in order to "eliminate an extra layer of bureaucracy."

Four deputies will be named for:

- **Press:** "Will oversee press services, radio & television services, and will coordinate -- thru a desk system -- **the public activities of all the agencies.** [This phrase was not further defined]"



- **Public Affairs:** "Will oversee such information services as design, photography, publishing, printing, video production & teleconferencing, and public & intergovernmental liaison." [Clearly a new departure in defining pa. It was not disclosed who if anyone helped Espy create it.]
- **Farming Outreach:** "Dealing with gov'ts & interest groups on issues related to farming, agricultural marketing & rural development."
- **Consumer Outreach:** "Dealing with issues such as nutrition & consumer protection."

PR staffers will apparently still have layers to work thru within the new office, plus going thru the client managers they serve. Would a modern decentralized team or matrix system be superior?

3. All individual agency pa staffs in Washington will either be eliminated or put under the new centralized office. PA functions in the field will be merged where possible. "We want to eliminate duplication & find economies of scale. Agencies don't need their own graphic designers or photographers or press spokespeople. Our departmental office **is now perfectly equipped to handle all those functions.**"

Centralizing hints at a desire for control, which may be needed -- but will this do it? The previous Sec'y, another ex-Congressman like Espy, issued an order that everything was to be cleared thru the central office -- but rescinded it when a roomful of materials poured in daily.

IS THIS JUST IGNORANCE OF PR, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Apparently Espy feels pr is press. The net result, especially in professionalized pa staffs like the Forest Service, will be replacing people who now do full-blown pr with what must end up being a centralized 1-way communication office. Or not getting the job done.

Consider the issues USDA has on its agenda: spotted owl, old growth forests, loss of topsoil, disappearance of family farms, huge agribusiness receiving pay-not-to-plant funds, nutritional labeling, poor meat inspection etc. etc. How will these be handled, especially in local areas?

Some questions -- since this could spread:

1. Is this a sop to the media, which always feel pr heads should roll?
2. Why in an administration devoted to grassroots, go-direct, public participation pr would an agency eliminate the pr people at the grassroots?
3. Is this another manifestation of Congress' dislike of pr -- with their oft stated preference that all outbound info go thru them? Espy was an MC 30 days ago.
4. Could this be, as Espy hinted, "symbolism"? He noted some of the moves were symbolic, others were policy.
5. Is there any appreciation here that pr requires professional training?

IT STILL WORKS: RESEARCH DELIVERS DATA & ATTRACTS ATTENTION

"We wanted to gather consumers' views on healthcare for our strategic planning purposes, and we want to have a voice in the national healthcare debate," Deborah Gelbart of St. Joseph's Hospital & Medical Center (Phoenix) told prr. Strategy: undertake research comparing the attitudes of health professionals with the public on medical ethics.

VALUABLE HEALTHCARE ISSUE DATA GATHERED 1,017 adults, 200 representatives from the medical community were surveyed. Findings show disparity of opinion between the two groups must be narrowed before healthcare reform can be addressed, says CEO Joseph DeSilva. Items:

- **ARE DOCS ETHICAL?** The public is less likely than physicians or hospital administrators to consider the medical profession to be ethical.

- **GOV'T SHOULD PAY FOR CARE** 85% of public & 88% of the medical community say gov't should be responsible for paying for healthcare if an individual is unable to do so.

- **SHOULD CARE BE RATIONED?** Medical community (72%) is more likely than the public (46%) to say healthcare dollars should be allocated depending on a patient's chance of survival. Asked about conducting a \$30,000 heart bypass regardless of age & survival chances, vast majority of the medical community recognized the limits & said it should not be conducted regardless. Majority of the public are unwilling to face these limits and say it should be conducted regardless.

- **NEW METHODS SHOULD BE TRIED** 72% of the public say they should have the right to choose experimental treatments without FDA approval. 46% of the medical community agree that the public should have this choice.

- **LIFE SUPPORT DECISIONS** The public & the medical community agree family members should have the right to decide whether or not to stop life support of a terminally ill relative. However, medical community is more inclined than the public to say physicians should have the same right.

- **LESS SUPPORT FOR HEALTH EDUCATION** The medical community would allocate more resources to routine/preventive care & direct patient care than would the public. Both groups agree direct patient care should receive the largest share of national healthcare dollars & **health education the least**. The medical community, however, is willing to put more money than the general public into direct patient care & less than the public into health education.

Survey's public relations benefits were "wonderful." Findings were featured in Hospitals Magazine ("our biggest, most prestigious trade publication"), USA Today (domestic & international), and many other publications. "It wasn't our primary goal, but the benefits are great. It positions us. Creates awareness of us in the healthcare reform debate as a leader. We want the whole country to know what we have to offer -- our services & intellectual resources."