

## **Guidance on using social media**

### **Social media**

Social networking sites and other social media are effective ways of communicating with others on both a personal and professional level.

Social media covers a number of internet-based tools including, but not limited to, blogs, internet forums, content communities and social networking sites, such as X, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, GDCUK, Instagram and Pinterest.

Professional social networking websites aimed solely at dental professionals are also forms of social media and are covered by this guidance.

### **Professional standards**

4.2.3 of the [Standards for the Dental Team](#) states:

‘You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified.’

The standards expected of dental professionals do not change because they are communicating through social media, rather than face to face or by other traditional media. As a dental professional, you have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly, both online and offline.

However, because anything that is said on social media is instantly made public, it creates new circumstances in which the standards apply. Your professional responsibilities, such as patient confidentiality and professional courtesy, are still fundamental when you use social media.

When using social media, you must:

- a. maintain and protect patients’ information by not publishing any information which could identify them on social media without their explicit consent
- b. maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients and other members of the dental team
- c. comply with any internet and social media policy set out by your employer.

Standard 6.1.2 of the [Standards for the Dental Team](#) states:

You must treat colleagues fairly and with respect, in all situations and all forms of interaction and communication. You must not bully, harass, or unfairly discriminate against them.

This includes interaction and communication on social media.

Do not instigate or take part in any form of cyber bullying, intimidation, or the use of offensive language online. If you share any such content posted by someone else, you can still be held responsible even though you did not create it.

## **Privacy**

Social media has blurred the boundaries between public and private life, and your online image can impact on your professional life. You should not post any information, including personal views, or photographs and videos, which could damage public confidence in you as a dental professional.

Posting information under another username does not guarantee your confidentiality. Even if you do not identify yourself as a dental professional, you must still follow the standards and this guidance when using social media.

You should think carefully before accepting friend requests from patients.

It is important to remember that anything you post on social media is instantly made public. It can be easily accessed by others and can be copied and redistributed without you knowing. You should presume that what you post online will be there permanently, even if you delete it afterwards.

You should regularly review your privacy settings for each of your social media profiles or accounts. However, you should be aware of the limitations of privacy online and remember that even the strictest privacy settings do not guarantee that your information will be kept secure. Ultimately, any information that you post could be viewed by anyone including your patients, colleagues or employer.

You should remember that information about your location may be embedded within photographs and other content and may be available for others to see.

## **Maintaining confidentiality**

Social media can be a useful and effective way of sharing information for the benefit of your work or business. For example, social media can be an effective means of advertising products and services.

Online discussions about anonymised patients and best practice can have an educational and professional benefit. Sites and groups for dental professionals can be useful places to find advice about current practice in specific circumstances.

Many dental professionals use social media sites that are not accessible to the public to share and find information. However, you must remember that many social media groups, even those set up for dental professionals, may still be accessible to members of the public.

If you decide to upload clinical information, including radiographs and photographs to any form of social media, you should carefully consider who may be able to view this information.

You must be careful not to share identifiable information about patients without their explicit consent. When obtaining consent you should specify, to the patient how exactly the information you propose to share will be used, for what purpose and where it will be available.

If you are sharing anonymised patient information, you must also take all possible precautions to make sure that the patient cannot be identified. Although individual pieces of information may

not breach a patient's confidentiality on their own, a number of pieces of patient information published online could be enough to identify them or someone close to them.

## **Raising concerns**

Social media should not be used as a way of raising concerns.

If you believe patients are being put at risk by a colleague's conduct, behaviour or decision-making, or by your working environment you should, where possible, follow the whistleblowing procedure at your workplace.

For advice or information on raising concerns you can:

- see Principle 8 of the [Standards for the Dental Team](#)
- call the independent advice line set up for dental professionals on 0800 668 1329
- see the GDC's advice on raising concerns which can be found under [Student FAQs](#) (third question) and raising [Concerns or complaints about an education or training provider](#)
- seek advice from your employer, defence organisation, or professional association.

You may find it helpful to contact your professional association or indemnifier for further guidance on the responsible use of social media.

**Effective from 27 June 2016**