
An introduction to:
**Using social media
during your career**



This guide is here to help you learn how to use social media as an NHS professional. It looks at how the things you post on social media sites can have an impact on your reputation and career. The impact can be positive or negative. This guide will help you make sure that the impact is positive.

First of all, we want to be clear that we don't want you to stop using social media. In fact, we'd like you to use social media as part of your Care Makers development.

We see the benefits of using social media every day. Increased networking and sharing of knowledge on social media sites are already helping us all get better at our jobs. If you think social media sites help you improve at your job, use them.

What we'd like you to be aware of is how the things you post online can have an impact on your career.

What is social media?

Social media includes any website or internet-based service which enables you to publish your own content (text, photos, videos, sound) in order to share it with other people. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are four of the best known examples.

Social media sites like these are set up to allow as many people as possible to see your content, comment on it and share it. Often, the default privacy setting for these sites is 'open', allowing people you don't know to see what you are sharing.

Who is using social media?

As more and more individuals use social media sites to communicate, organisations are also using social media to stay in touch with their customers. Below is a list of some of the people using social media who could have an impact on your career:

- NHS organisations
- patients
- professional bodies
- universities
- government departments
- the media (newspapers, radio, the BBC, news websites, television programmes, and presenters)
- the police
- local councils

Talking about my generation

Many of you have grown up using the internet and social media sites. You'll be used to organising your work and personal lives through Facebook and Twitter, liking friends' videos and pictures and openly sharing what you've been up to at the weekend.

Some of your colleagues haven't grown up with social media and have had to learn how to use it from scratch. This means sometimes your colleagues won't understand why you may use social media sites a lot, personally and professionally.

Don't treat them as silly quite yet! For your own sake, some of their worries about social media are worth knowing about.

Social media pros and cons

Pros



1. Easy to connect with like-minded people.
2. A quick way of getting answers to questions and information.
3. Easy to talk with senior people you'd never speak to in real life.
4. A great way of increasing the size of your professional network.
5. A way of finding out what best practice is in your field of study or care.

Cons



1. Hard to keep your professional and personal lives separate.
2. Open to all – anyone can look at your Twitter profile or Google your name.
3. Easy for organisations and the media to search through your social media posts.
4. It can be hard to permanently delete social media posts. Screen shots are very easy to take.
5. Posts on social media sites often lack context. It is sometimes hard to get humour or tone of voice across on the sites.

Across the NHS, staff are using social media every day to talk to each other and share their ideas and experiences. This can help share best practice. NHS England is starting to look at how they can monitor what the public are talking about online and then promote the relevant information on NHS Choices. The NHS is waking up to the power of social media and digital tools.

Where does your personal life end and your professional image begin?

Just as social media helps to give you a way of contacting colleagues across the country, it also gives people access to your thoughts, experiences and opinions.

This can cause a problem as this access often breaks down the barrier between your professional and personal lives and personas.

“Hyper-connectivity is already removing any meaningful distinction between online and offline identities, while also blurring ‘public’ and ‘private’ identities.”

Professor Sir John Beddington, Chief Scientific Advisor to HM Government and Head of the Government Office for Science

We’ve seen a very clear example of that with the case of Paris Brown, the Kent Youth Police and Crime Commissioner, who **had to resign from her job** because of tweets she had posted between the ages of 14 and 16.

As you move from being a student to an employee, you take on much more responsibility for upholding your and the organisation’s values in the eyes of the public.

When we join the NHS we sign up to its values and expected behaviours. These are spoken about in the **NHS Constitution**. They help our patients to trust us and each of us to trust each other.

By working for the NHS we become part of it and represent it and our professions to the people around us. Just as you wouldn’t expect a judge to be tweeting how many Jäger bombs they had on Friday night, the media and the public don’t expect to see nurses, doctors or any NHS staff tweeting or updating Facebook with things that don’t match their professional image.

Once you’ve identified yourself as an NHS employee and Care Makers online, you sign up to the values of the NHS and Care Makers. People will expect you to uphold the behaviour that fits being a Care Maker. Even if all your friends are updating their profiles with pictures of drunken nights out, you should ask yourself how that would look to a patient or your boss.

Who cares what you say online?

Patients are becoming ever more aware that they can find out information about their condition and medical team online. A patient may search for your name online to see what you’re like, and a potential employer could do the same thing. The media may read your updates to try and find a story, just as they did with Paris Brown.

Why do the media care?

The media’s job is to sell newspapers and advertising space in their papers and on their websites. To do this they write interesting news stories that attract their audiences.

Sometimes these stories are based on people behaving wrongly or weirdly. Think of how many celebrity stories are based on their behaviour, what they eat, what they don’t eat, what they drink, say, how they act. All of it is being compared to what readers expect celebrities to do.

Just as you might expect celebrities to behave in a certain way, Care Makers are expected to behave with compassion, empathy and professionalism.

If you share behaviours and opinions online that don’t match those expectations, the media may write a story about you. They’ll do this to shock their readers and keep them reading their paper and/or website.

Here’s a theoretical example:

The Care Makers all go out for a meal together as part of getting to know each other and strengthening your relationships. That’s perfectly normal. In fact, a couple of you tweet about how great it is to meet the others again and exchange stories and ideas. A few other tweeting nurses wish you well and the meal passes without incident.

Later on, a few of you decide to extend the evening a little and hit a few bars and a club. Shots, dancing and a few snogs later, you roll into your hotel room and realise that you’ve tweeted a series of photos of you all drunk and with drinks in your hands. Not to worry, you think, who hasn’t done that before?!

The morning after, you wake up to all of your friends posting on your Facebook wall:

“OMG! You’re in the Daily Mail! Looks like a good night :)”

“Haha! Look at you in the paper!”

“Sh*t, too late to delete those tweets now :P”



As you’ve slept it off, The Daily Mail has written and published a story with the headline:

“NHS nurses party ‘til 3am on taxpayer-funded night out”

“Five NHS nurses who were specially picked to receive training and support as ‘Care Makers’ drunkenly partied until 3am after enjoying a taxpayer-funded meal out.

“Instead of resting up for their second day at the nursing conference, they spent the night drinking vodka with a group of local lads.

“The Care Makers were carefully selected from more than 500 applicants, and their nursing training is paid for by the taxpayer.

“Sue Hempsted from The Patient’s Association said, “It is unbelievable that when given the chance to really make a difference for their patients, these nurses are more interested in getting drunk than learning. I would be worried if my mother was cared for by one of them.”

This may seem far-fetched but similar stories have happened in real life (see over).

Hospital A&E staff suspended for playing Facebook 'Lying Down Game' while on duty

By Daily Mail Reporter
Created 12:22 PM on 09th September 2009

A group of doctors and nurses have been suspended after bosses caught them posting photographs of themselves playing 'The Lying Down Game' on Facebook.

Seven staff at the Great Western Hospital in Swindon, Wiltshire, allegedly took part in the internet craze by lying down on resuscitation trollies, ward floors and a heli-pad.

The group, from the hospitals Accident and Emergency department and Acute Assessment Unit, had been working a night shift and posted photographs of the stunt on Facebook.

Youth crime commissioner Paris Brown stands down over Twitter row

Vikram Dodd
The Guardian, Tuesday 9 April 2013 16:18 BST

Brown apologises for writing comments on social networking sites that she admits 'have offended many people'.



Paris Brown announcing that she will stand down from her role as youth crime commissioner over her Twitter messages.

Woman 'sacked' on Facebook for complaining about her boss after forgetting she had added him as a friend

By Julie Moulton
Created 10:26 AM on 14th August 2009

It's never a good idea to criticise your boss on the internet. But it's certainly not advisable to post an expletive-laden rant that he's able to see.

A young woman paid with her job after seemingly forgetting that she had made online 'friends' with her employer before launching into a tirade.

Top tips on staying professional when using social media

To help you avoid any of those mistakes, here are our six top tips on staying professional when using social media:

1. Check your privacy settings on your social media accounts, particularly Facebook. Go to <http://facebook.com/about/privacy> to find out more.
2. Google yourself. What do you find? Is it in line with the Care Makers values?
3. Always take a moment to ask if the update you're about to send fits with the Care Makers values and your professional reputation.
4. Never drink and post! Just put a ban on any updates after you've started drinking.
5. Go back through your tweets. Are they OK? Could a paper use them to make a story? If so, consider starting a new Twitter account that you use professionally, and anonymise your personal account. Alternatively, you could delete any tweets you think might be too risky.
6. Don't lose your personality online. Just remember that you represent nursing and Care Makers.