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BRIEFING 109

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN NHS LEADERSHIP

Since our first NHS social media briefing for chief executives in 2013, senior leaders across the NHS have driven an upward trend in using social media as part of their work. In this updated briefing we look at the what, why and how of using social media as an NHS leader in times of unprecedented service pressures and need for reconfiguration. We also highlight examples of good practice and explore what social media might hold for leadership in the future.

This briefing is intended to help you reflect on social media's role in communicating your vision and values, listening to staff and patients and engaging with a wide range of people and organisations. It covers:

- the five things you need to know about social media for you and your organisation
 - what characterises social media, who uses it and its place in the communications world
 - NHS examples of using social media in leadership
 - how to get the most from social media as a leader in the NHS.
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The five things you need to know about social media for you and your organisation

1. It's more than just Twitter! The rise of platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram has seen a move from the public, NHS staff and the media to new online spaces.
2. One-to-many platforms like Facebook and Twitter are great, but people are moving to one-to-a-few platforms such as Facebook Messenger, Viber and WhatsApp. How you migrate and mix in these places as a leader will be crucial over the next two years if you are to maintain a broad online audience, especially with staff.
3. Google your organisation and see what the Google reviews say about it. Online there is a rich source of patient and public feedback, it is important that patient experience and Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) teams are enabled to integrate online feedback into their work.
4. Using social media as an NHS leader should be about listening and responding to a variety of viewpoints, not just broadcasting your point of view.
5. Staff will only get the most out of social media if they are encouraged to use it. Get your HR and communications teams to read our [Social Media Toolkit for the NHS](#) to help them develop a permissive social media policy.

Using social media is likely to be a natural extension of the work you are already doing to collaborate and improve services across multiple teams and organisations in your local area.

Leaders and managers continue to be faced with the task of affecting change through relationships. As the sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) continue to be developed up and down England, the need to collaborate and integrate with multiple existing and new organisations is only going to grow more important for the sustainability of the NHS.

Social media has a role to play in enabling leaders to work together across the healthcare, social care and voluntary sectors. By using social media, leaders can flexibly engage with multiple people, adapting to various audiences on different platforms with different media. For example, using video summaries instead of 30 page documents.



Facebook

Unique audience 38.9 million UK adults

Comment: Still the most popular platform in the UK by far. Creates unofficial pages for NHS trusts and offices based on people 'checking in'.



LinkedIn

Unique audience 21.8 million UK adults

Comment: Added a million to its unique audience between 2015 and 2016. Some evidence of usefulness in NHS recruitment.



Twitter

Unique audience 20.9 million UK adults

Comment: Very popular in NHS circles. Still the place for breaking news. Struggling to become financially sustainable.



Instagram

Unique audience 16.5 million UK adults

Comment: Owned by Facebook. Influential in lifestyle circles. Could become useful in NHS recruitment.



Snapchat

Unique audience 7.1 million UK adults

Comment: Where people hide from their parents who are on Facebook. Becoming ever more popular (and commercial).



Facebook Messenger

Unique audience 22.5 million UK adults

Comment: The place where a lot of private discussion goes on, away from the open platform of Facebook.



WhatsApp

Unique audience 16.7 million UK adults

Comment: Part of the Facebook family of apps. WhatsApp broadcast lists could be the future of the internal newsletter.

ref: Ofcom Communications Market Report 2016,

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/26393/uk_internet.pdf

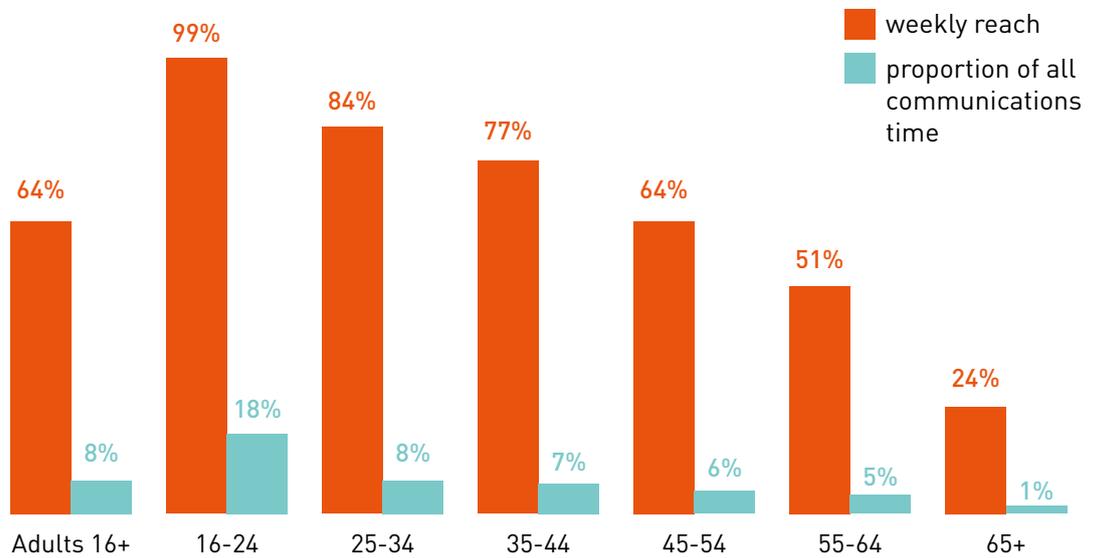




Key statistics

- 86 per cent of UK adults (16+ years old) have internet access at home, via any device.
- 45 per cent of UK adults aged 75+ years old have internet access at home, up from 32 per cent in 2014.
- 71 per cent of UK households claimed to own a smartphone, with this figure rising to 91 per cent in the 25-34 age group.
- 44 per cent of UK adults report they have used the internet to find health information.

Social media use, by age group



Source: Ofcom Digital Day 2016

Adult diary: Chart shows the proportion of adults who recorded communicating through social networking site or using social media site for certain types of media activity across their diary week. Proportion of media and comms time is calculated from the durations of these activities.

Base: Adults aged 16+ (1512), 16-24 (129), 25-34 (189), 35-44 (282), 45-54 (299), 55-64 (259), 65+ (354)

Source:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/26393/uk_internet.pdf

Examples of great social media work

Staff engagement via a closed Facebook group

United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust (ULHT) uses a closed Facebook group (you request to join on Facebook) to share patient feedback with staff.

As Sharon Kidd, ULHT's patient experience and engagement manager says in her patient opinion blog post: "Unlike by email, on Facebook, colleagues will comment and tag each other in [patient opinion] stories that are relevant to each other, or congratulate their team. It's really rewarding to see and it's a much more suitable way to share the great feedback."

This example shows the power of the principle of 'fish where the fish are'. There is often little point in trying to pull people to a new channel of communication when they are already using another one. In this case Facebook is used by the large majority of staff, making a group on Facebook easy to access for most staff.

Providing insight into the NHS - @NHS

The Twitter profile @NHS was launched in 2016 and aims to celebrate the NHS by bringing to life the stories of patients and staff in their own tweets, pictures and videos.

Each week, a new patient or member of NHS staff takes control of the @NHS Twitter account. They curate the @NHS account for five days, tweeting about their life and experiences of being treated by or working in the NHS. They have conversations with people throughout the UK and the world often using video, pictures and emoticons to discuss the services and issues which are most important to them.

The @NHS profile is a fantastic example of how the NHS is using social media to generate debate and enable people with an NHS story to share their experiences. It's open, honest and has people at the heart of it.

WhatsApp with your diabetes

The paediatric diabetes service at Ealing Hospital (part of London North West Hospitals NHS Trust) set up a WhatsApp broadcast list for their patients. The list, which functions like a bcc'd email newsletter, connects diabetic children together with hospital staff. The work, led by consultant paediatrician Dr Priya Kumar, enables patients to send their thoughts and experiences to the hospital team who then share these with the group.

Dr Kumar reports: "As a result of the group having been set up, average HbA1c levels for patients dropped. This is important for people with diabetes as the higher the HbA1c, the greater the risk of developing diabetes-related complications. In addition, the WhatsApp group has seen patient involvement increase."

This is a lovely example of how a team has adapted their communication and service to the preferences of their patients, leading to better outcomes for the patients.

Values-based leadership

Rob Webster's consistent and honest use of social media has enabled him to build on his values-based leadership approach. Through Rob's use of Twitter (@NHS_RobW) and his blog he has set out his leadership principles and holds himself accountable to them via his posts.

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Charity online forums

Forums are still immensely popular with patients and carers. Being able to find and communicate with other people with the same conditions, worries, successes and questions is extremely valuable to people. The charity sector is doing fantastic work in this area, creating safe and compassionate spaces for patients and qualified health and social care professionals to ask and answer questions and share their day-to-day experiences.

The challenge for NHS leaders is to learn from this approach and not re-invent the wheel. Ensure your colleagues have the permission and knowledge to be able to integrate charities’ forums and online communities into their services.

Macmillan’s online community:

<https://community.macmillan.org.uk/groups/>

Beating Bowel Cancer’s community:

<http://community.beatingbowelcancer.org/>

Carers Trust’s community:

<https://space.carers.org/>

NHS gradscheme Snapchat (nhsgradscheme)



The NHS graduate scheme is often ahead of the wider trends in social media use within the NHS, and its presence on Snapchat is no different. The scheme’s relatively narrow target audience of recent graduates and career changers means they too

‘fish where the fish are’ and use the platforms the best graduate talent are using. As Rob Farace, senior programme lead for resourcing says: “Candidates appreciate the time we invest with them and the opportunity they have to talk to us on a platform they’re used to and feel comfortable with.” Find out more about NHS gradscheme’s use of social media in our [HR and social media briefing](#).

Where next for social media in the NHS?

The trend in social media and online communications is currently moving towards a more partitioned approach, with people using different apps to converse with different groups of friends, family and companies. Just as the NHS has become more comfortable in using platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to talk with staff, patients and the public there looks to be a shift towards chat apps such as Snapchat, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. This shift means the NHS will need to adapt to the increasingly personalised approach of communicating on these platforms, in order to continue to reach the NHS' audiences online. Coupled with this is the growing popularity of video content across all platforms. How the NHS integrates video will be a key communications and engagement challenge throughout 2017-2018.

Your communications team should be able to help you take advantage of the changes in online communication trends. Get in touch with communications@nhsemployers.org to hear about our latest AV and social media training courses. Find out more about social media in the NHS at www.nhsemployers.org/socialmedia.



NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

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