This guide has been produced to help you learn how to use social media as an NHS professional. It considers how your social media posts can have an impact on your reputation and career.

Globally, social media is impacting on the way healthcare is planned, delivered and discussed. In the UK, the health and care sector is represented on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Every day NHS staff, patients, and the public are discussing the NHS online - from feedback on services to the detail of commissioning.

This guide helps you answer these questions:

- What should I know about social media now I work for the NHS?
- What should I do with my personal social media profiles?
- What impact could social media have on my job?

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**KEY ACTIONS**

- Read your employer’s policy covering social media use at work.
- Read your profession’s guidance on using social media as a healthcare professional.
- Check the privacy settings on your personal social media profiles.
- Look back over your updates and see if any don’t match your profession’s values and standards.
- Speak to your communications team for help setting up social media profiles for work.
- Make connections across your profession and the NHS.
A permissive approach
You don’t have to stop using social media. The benefits of using social media in the NHS are seen every day and increased networking and knowledge sharing on social media sites are already helping NHS professionals in their careers.

If you think social media can help you develop in your role, use it. However, it is worth being aware of how your social media posts can impact on your professional reputation.

Read your local social media policy
Many NHS organisations have a staff policy covering social media use at work. It may be a standalone document or found in the IT or HR policies. It is important that you read the policy to make sure you know where your employer stands on social media use, both personally and professionally, at work.

Read your profession’s social media guidance
Many of the healthcare professional colleges and societies have released guidance on using social media for work. Staying up to date with this guidance will help you get the most out of social media.

You can find a list of some of the guidance available by profession on the NHS Employers website.

Social media pros and cons

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<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to connect with like-minded people.</td>
<td>Hard to keep your professional and personal lives separate.</td>
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<td>A quick way of getting information and answers to questions.</td>
<td>Open to all – anyone can look at your Twitter profile or Google your name.</td>
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<td>Easy to talk with senior people you’d never speak to in real life.</td>
<td>Easy for organisations and the media to search through your social media posts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A great way of increasing the size of your professional network.</td>
<td>It can be hard to permanently delete social media posts. Screen shots are very easy to take.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A way of finding out what best practice is in your area of work.</td>
<td>Posts on social media sites often lack context. It can be difficult to get humour across on social media.</td>
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Update the privacy settings on your personal profiles

Working in the NHS can mean your social media profiles are of more interest to the public and the media than if you were to work in other sectors, because controversial NHS stories sell papers.

A top tip is to check what privacy settings you have on your social media profiles. Our Facebook privacy flyer has all you need to know to get started. Each social media platform is different, so it’s worth checking your settings on each one.

You can also Google yourself to see what comes up. Do any of your social media profiles pop up in the results?

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. As Professor Sir John Beddington, then the government’s chief scientific adviser and head of the Government Office for Science, wrote⁴,

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

We saw a very clear example of that in 2013 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 years old.

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; a potential employer could do the same thing. The media may read your updates to try and find or confirm a story, just as they did with Paris Brown.

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⁴ The Future of Identity – executive summary
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. 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, NHS employees are expected to behave with respect, dignity, compassion, empathy and professionalism.

If you post 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.

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’.

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

By Julie Moul
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.
GET INVOLVED AND STAY SAFE WITH THESE TOP TIPS

1. Take it slowly, observe how others use social media first.
2. Don’t feel you have to be online all the time, commit as much time to it as you are comfortable.
3. Ask questions. NHS people on social media love helping people out.
4. If you wouldn’t say it out loud in the canteen, don’t post it online.
5. Don’t lose your personality online. Just remember you represent the NHS and your employer.
6. Get in touch with your communications team if you’d like to know more about how you can use social media for work.

Further reading
- www.nhsemployers.org/socialmedia
- NHS social media toolkit
- Facebook privacy flyer

HOW TO CHECK YOUR FACEBOOK PRIVACY SETTINGS IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES

NHS staff can find themselves part of stories on the news and in the media. To make their stories more relatable, the media use pictures they find online of the people they are reporting on. Here’s what you can do in just ten minutes to reduce the likelihood of your holiday snaps on Facebook becoming the ones they use, or worse still, becoming the story.

Top Tip: The quickest way to access all of the privacy and security settings on Facebook is on a desktop computer.

Step 1: Desktop privacy check up (3 mins)
- Click the padlock symbol and go through the privacy check up list.
- Click on the drop down menus under each question to review your current settings.

Top Tip: Your current and past profile and cover photos are public so make sure these remain professional.

Step 2: View what other people see when they view your timeline and profile (2 mins)
- Under the ‘Who can see my stuff?’ drop down you’ll find the very handy ‘View as’ option. This lets you see how your profile and timeline can be viewed by a member of the public.
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.

Acknowledgements
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