**Guideline**

**Social Media – Staff**

**Relevant to:**

To all staff

**Purpose of Guidance:**

Social media is an effective way for members of staff to celebrate their own, their team and the Trust’s achievements and the Trust encourages colleagues to use social media in this way. However, in using social media, colleagues need to be careful not to do anything which brings the Trust into disrepute. The guidelines here set out how colleagues can avoid doing this.

**Guidance to Follow:**

**Trust uses of social media**

1. The Trust uses social media as part of its communication strategy. The communications department has authority to speak on behalf of the Trust and is responsible for managing the Trust’s official sites, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

2. Social media, like other communication tools, is used to improve the public’s understanding of the Trust and its work, promote health and services, and engage with the general public. When using social media sites, the communications department will, on behalf of the Trust, ensure that:
   - comments and posts reflect the Trust’s vision and values
   - responses are respectful towards patients, members of the public and Trust staff
   - confidential or sensitive information about patients, staff or the organisation or offensive or derogatory posts are removed
   - defamatory comments about members of our staff should not be shared in any public forum. Legal advice will be sought and action taken where necessary.

**How staff can use social media to promote their work**

3. Staff are encouraged to use social media to raise awareness of the work they are doing and of their team. Social media is not just a way of reaching external audiences but of communicating with colleagues internally.

4. Examples of social media use which colleagues can employ, are:
   - Posting a small piece of text or photo about some work they are doing or a recent achievements
   - Posting something about their team, or a photo of their team
   - Liking or retweeting a post put up by the Trust’s communications department
   - If colleagues are uncertain about how best to use social media in their work, please contact the communications department.
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- Medway NHS Foundation Trust’s social media accounts:

  **Facebook account:** @MedwayNHS ([https://www.facebook.com/MedwayNHS](https://www.facebook.com/MedwayNHS))

  **Twitter account:** @Medway_NHS_FT ([https://twitter.com/Medway_NHS_FT](https://twitter.com/Medway_NHS_FT))

  **Instagram:** @MedwayNHS ([https://www.instagram.com/medwaynhs/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/medwaynhs/?hl=en))

### Taking care when using social media

5. There are a number of guidelines which colleagues should follow in using social media, to protect themselves.

### Make clear opinions are your own

6. If a member of staff discloses that they work for the Trust or can be identified as an employee through association with other people, they should ensure their profile and related content is consistent with how the Trust would expect them to present themselves professionally.

### Do not set up official Trust sites

7. All official social media sites are managed by the communications department. No other teams/staff within the Trust should set up corporate sites without the authorisation of the communications department. Staff should not set up sites that are made to resemble an official site.

### Consider communicating as yourself

8. If a member of staff associates themselves with Medway NHS Foundation Trust on their social media site, they are expected to post under their real name. This demonstrates openness, honesty and accountability.

### Respect others

9. Posts must not contain anything contrary to the Trust’s equality and inclusion policy. Anything containing racist, sexist, homophobic, sexually explicit, threatening, abusive, disrespectful or other unlawful comments must not be published. Inappropriate comments relating to protected characteristics set out in current legislation, for example disability, should also not be posted.

### Be aware of how online posts are, or can become, public

10. When staff publish something on social media, they should assume it is in the public domain.

11. Staff should be aware of privacy limitations when posting material. Even if something is initially shared with a limited group of followers or friends, it could still be copied and shared or published elsewhere.
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12 Staff should carefully consider what they want to say before they publish anything, and work on the basis that anything they write or post could be shared more widely without their knowledge or permission. Staff should configure their privacy settings and review them regularly because:
- social media sites cannot guarantee confidentiality, and do change settings once information is online, it can be difficult to remove it

Get your facts right
13 When posting information, staff must ensure it is factually correct. If they discover they have reported something incorrectly, they should amend it and make it clear they have done so.

Understand the implications of defamation
14 Staff could face legal proceedings for posted comments aimed at named individuals or an organisation that are considered to harm reputation.

Respect copyrights
15 Staff may use the Trust logo and photos from the internet and intranet if they are posting to raise awareness, in a positive way, of their own work within the Trust. Staff should not use the Trust and NHS logo and photos from the internet or intranet sites for any other purposes as these are copyright protected.

Be careful when talking about work-related issues
16 Staff should only share information about the Trust that is in the public domain, and should not add derogatory comments on these issues.
17 Staff must also respect patient confidentiality, and should not disclose information that could identify a patient in any way.

Don't bring yourself or the Trust into disrepute
18 Staff should not air grievances or publish anything that risks bringing the Trust into disrepute.

Be careful about the use of photos
19 Staff should think carefully before posting photos that relate to their work or photos in an identifiable work setting. Staff should not use a photo of themselves in uniform as their profile picture; this could give the impression that their site is an official site.
20 Staff must not post images, of any description, containing patients on personal social media accounts.

Protect patient confidentiality
21 Confidentiality must be respected by anyone who posts anything about their work on the internet, and under no circumstances should anything be posted that identifies a patient.
Staff should ensure they know Trust policy on patient confidentiality and follow it at all times.

The DH guidance on patient confidentiality is contained in the publication “Confidentiality: NHS Code of Practice (Nov 2003)”. This states that all NHS staff have a duty to keep confidential all information about patients, and to not disclose this information to anyone not involved directly in their care. It is a legal obligation derived from case law; a requirement within professional codes of conduct; and is included in NHS employment contracts as a specific requirement linked to disciplinary procedures.

It is Trust policy to gain written consent from patients for all disclosures of identifiable information to the media and for publicity purposes. As well as names and other personal details, this includes the use of images of the patient undergoing treatment in a real life situation and where the patient is posing for a picture.

Indirect breaches of confidentiality

Nothing written by staff should comment on, or provide additional information about, cases already in the public eye – for example, any incident that has already been reported in the media.

Respect safeguarding issues

Posts made by staff must not encourage behaviour that could be linked to safeguarding issues, for example:

- Bullying
- Luring and exploitation
- Theft of personal information
- Encouraging self-harm or violence
- Glorifying activities such as excessive drinking or drug taking

These kinds of posts may be investigated and result in disciplinary action.

Adhere to other Trust policies and procedures

Staff using social networking sites should always adhere to the Trust’s vision and values, as well as codes of conduct and policies which are part of their professional and employment requirements.

Being harassed, bullied or victimised via a social networking site?

If staff believe they are being harassed, bullied or victimised as a result of another member of staff’s post to an internet site, they can take action. Staff should access the Trust’s Respect policy which outlines the informal and formal action that can be taken.
When you can use social media

30 Staff may use social media to raise awareness of their work, within working hours. Staff should not use social media for other purposes outside their allocated break times.

Doctors’ use of social media

31 When advertising your services, you must make sure the information you publish is factual and can be checked, and does not exploit patients’ vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge.

The benefits of using social media

32 Doctors’ use of social media can benefit patient care by:
   - engaging people in public health and policy discussions
   - establishing national and international professional networks
   - facilitating patients’ access to information about health and services.

Maintaining boundaries

33 Using social media also creates risks, particularly where social and professional boundaries become unclear. You must follow the guidance in Maintaining a professional boundary between you and your patient.

34 If a patient contacts you about their care or other professional matters through your private profile, you should indicate that you cannot mix social and professional relationships and, where appropriate, direct them to your professional profile.

Maintaining confidentiality

35 Many doctors use professional social media sites that are not accessible to the public. Such sites can be useful places to find advice about current practice in specific circumstances. However, you must still be careful not to share identifiable information about patients.

36 Although individual pieces of information may not breach confidentiality on their own, the sum of published information online could be enough to identify a patient or someone close to them.

37 You must not use publicly accessible social media to discuss individual patients or their care with those patients or anyone else.

Anonymity

38 If you identify yourself as a doctor in publicly accessible social media, you should also identify yourself by name. Any material written by authors who represent themselves as doctors is likely to be taken on trust and may reasonably be taken to represent the views of the profession more widely.

39 You should also be aware that content uploaded anonymously can, in many cases, be traced back to its point of origin.
Implications of not following the guidance:

Misconduct

Any member of staff found to be using social media sites inappropriately, as outlined in the principles above, may be subject to disciplinary action and will be managed in line with the relevant Trust policies.

Registered clinicians may put their registration at risk if they post inappropriate information on social networking sites.

Useful Contacts:

Communications team: communications.medwayft@nhs.net

Monitoring the Process:

The communications team monitor social media sites and will become aware of any inappropriate posts by staff.

National Definitions:

Data Protection legislation

Reference Material & Associated Documents:

Social Media Guidelines - Patients and Visitors - GURGR022

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