



## **Social Media Guidance**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to Registrants regarding responsible use of social media and how to use social media in a manner that is compatible with the BPC's Code of Ethics ('the Code').
2. Naturally, social media offers many benefits, both professionally and personally to Registrants including the ability to:
  - Connect, and establish national and international professional networks;
  - Engage with the public and help them to understand what the profession does;
  - Advertise their professional services;
  - Access resources for Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
  - Raise the profile of the profession;
3. This guidance is not intended to address every issue that may arise when using social media but instead focuses on good practice and issues that Registrants may come across frequently.
4. The BPC accepts that most Registrants will already be using social media responsibly and in a manner that is compatible with the Code.
5. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Code and any social media policy imposed by a Registrant's employer or MI, as and where applicable.

### **Social Media**

6. Social media covers a number of web-based tools that enables users to create and share content or participate in online communication. Examples of social media include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Flickr, and You Tube as means of example.
7. The principles outlined in this guidance can be generally applied to other kinds of online communication such as personal websites, blogs, talks at online conferences, publishing clinical content online and discussion boards.

### **Code of Ethics**

8. The relevant parts of the BPC's Code are as follows:

### **Confidentiality**

- Paragraph 2 - Registrants must take all reasonable steps to preserve the confidentiality of information acquired through their practice and protect the privacy of individuals and organisations about whom information is held.
- Paragraph 17 - If publishing or presenting clinical or supervisory material either orally, written or film/video form, Registrants must make every effort to ensure the anonymity of patients and where clinically appropriate seek the patient's permission. If doing research, the nature, purpose and conditions of any research involving clinical material must be fully explained to the patient and informed consent must be obtained.
- Paragraph 18 - Registrants who take part in any media or other public event must exercise caution, particularly with regard to confidentiality.

9. When a Registrant posts information about another person on social media, they should first think whether it is appropriate to share that information.
10. If the information posted enables a patient to be identified, a Registrant should not place that information online without the patient's express permission. Patient confidentiality is paramount.
11. Even if a Registrant has the highest level of privacy settings enabled on their preferred social media platform, they should still remember that any post, tweet, comments, or information placed online can quickly be copied and redistributed to wider audience and will remain online even if deleted. Ultimately, any information a Registrant posts can be viewed by anyone, at any time, including colleagues, their employer, MI, patients, or the BPC.
12. Registrants should also note that information about their location may be embedded within photographs or other content placed online and may be available for others to see without them knowing.
13. As a result of the above, Registrants should try and stay up to date regarding changes to privacy settings of their preferred social media platform and seek assistance from colleagues or attend additional training as and where they deem required.

### Conduct

- Paragraph 3 - Registrants must conduct themselves and their professional activities in such a way that does not damage the interests of their patients or participants in their training.
- Paragraph 13 - Registrants must carry out their duties in a professional and ethical way and maintain appropriate and professional boundaries with patients at all times, so that they are not exploited in any way.
- Paragraph 16 - Registrants must conduct themselves in such a manner as not to bring the profession, colleagues, or themselves into disrepute, and must maintain fitting levels of respect and courtesy with colleagues and members of their own and other professions and with their employer if employed and also with the public.

14. When using social media, Registrants should apply the same standards used when communicating with persons in other ways e.g. in person or in written correspondence.
15. Registrants should always be polite and respectful online and avoid using language which others may find inappropriate, offensive, or discriminatory.
16. Registrants should not post any information, including personal views, photographs or videos which could damage public confidence in them as a BPC Registrant or the profession as a whole.
17. Registrants should use their professional judgement when deciding whether to share or post information online and should remember that comments or posts can be taken out of context and potentially be reposted to a wider audience than originally intended.
18. Registrants should also be aware of perception and understand that members of the public may view their following, participation in, and/or the sharing of posts as acceptance of its views. If a Registrant thinks that something could be deemed as inappropriate or offensive, they should not post or share it.
19. Registrants should be aware that posting, tweeting, or sharing information online generally under another username does not guarantee confidentiality. Even if a Registrant does not identify themselves as a BPC Registrant on their social media account, they must still follow the Code and this guidance when using social media.
20. Registrants should keep in mind that patients may be able to locate and contact them through their personal social media accounts. If this happens, the Registrant should refuse such friend requests to preserve the professional therapeutic relationship. If a patient wishes to contact a Registrant and procure their services, the Registrant should contact them and provide their professional email address or website link.

### **Advertising**

- *Paragraph 15 - If advertising, Registrants shall confine such advertising to a statement of name, relevant qualifications, address, telephone number and a brief statement of the service offered. Such statements must be descriptive and not evaluative.*
- 21. If a Registrant uses social media to advertise information regarding their professional practice, they must ensure that the information provided is true and accurate.
- 22. A Registrant may choose to include a disclaimer on their profile stating that the views expressed within are their own views and do not represent the views of their employer, MI or anyone who contracts their services.

### **Fitness to Practise**

23. Registrants may place their BPC registration at risk if they act in a manner, on social media, which is unlawful or contrary to the Code.
24. Such unprofessional behaviour could include, but is not limited to:

- Sharing confidential information inappropriately online and without consent;
- Building or pursuing physical/sexual relationships with patients;
- Inciting hatred or discrimination;
- Acting in a bullying or intimidating manner
- Making defamatory personal statements about individuals

25. If a Registrant becomes aware that another Registrant is using social media in any of the ways outlined above, they should report their concerns to the BPC using the following email address [FtPO@bpc.org.uk](mailto:FtPO@bpc.org.uk) .

### **Tips for Social Media use**

26. Before a Registrant decides to post, tweet, or share information online they should:

- **Think before they post** e.g who will see it and how will they feel if the post goes viral online or is viewed by the BPC, their MI or employer.
- **Think whether the post will bring the reputation of the profession into disrepute** e.g. Is the content of the post appropriate and in accordance with the Code? If therapeutically inclined, is the information credible, accurate, thoroughly researched and evidenced based etc.
- **Check the privacy settings** e.g. Are the privacy settings at the highest and have they been reviewed recently, is the profile open or closed to the public etc.
- **Verify and authenticate before sharing or liking** e.g. Apply the same level of caution that would ordinarily be applied in connection with a more formal publication.
- **Admit wrongdoing where required** e.g. If something is published that is incorrect, quickly delete the post and issue a separate correction post thereafter.

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