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Social Media User Guidance - Staff

College of Paramedics

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Social Media User Guidance - Staff

Social Media User Guidance - Staff, Council Members, Specialist Section Members, Regional Groups

This document provides direction for College of Paramedics staff and members in elected positions (e.g. Council members, committee members, Specialist Sections, Regional groups) that use social media when carrying out their roles. The organisation’s social media communications should complement and reinforce content from the website, emails and marketing campaigns.

This guidance aims to protect individuals and the strategic position and reputation of the College and clarify how social media provides interactive opportunities for the organisation to articulate its aims and aspirations with members, stakeholders, related organisations, the press and a national and international community of paramedics.

This document complements the **College of Paramedics Social Media User Guidance - College Members** and both will need to be reviewed on a regular basis

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1. - Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is designed to help College staff and members in elected positions (e.g. Council members, Specialist Sections, and Regional Groups) to understand how best to use Social Media. It clarifies the benefits and addresses reputational technical and brand risk issues and offers recommendations for how staff and members should and shouldn't engage with online communities.

It aims for a balanced approach so as not to deter from engaging via social networks while making it clear the responsibilities of staff and council members and what topics should be avoided.

Over time we hope to see the College have a strong and influential presence within the social media arena. We would continue to utilise the main College Twitter and Facebook feeds, which are operated at an executive level, supported by regional engagement and by individuals of interest across the organisation.

N.B. This guidance does not deal with issues related to the personal use of social media by individuals. However, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) have urged registrants to use caution in regards to social networking and UNISON are concerned that members may be putting their personal safety at risk as well as their employment and registration. Individuals are therefore advised to access appropriate advice in relation to personal use of these sites.

2. - Definition of social media

The terms "social media" and "social networking" are often used interchangeably to refer to web-based tools and technologies that support online communication and information sharing. Social media is, in effect, a publishing and broadcasting medium and includes:

- Blogs – writing a blog or commenting on people's blogs
- Micro-blogs such as Twitter
- Social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Ning, and having a personal profile page on one of the social or business networking sites
- Content-sharing services, such as Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo
- Product or service reviews on retailer sites, or customer review sites
- Online votes and polls
- Public and private web forums (message boards)
- Wikis are websites developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content
- Podcasts
- Social bookmarking, such as Delicious
- Location based services (e.g. Foursquare)

Boyd & Ellison (2008) define social networking sites as web based services that allow individuals to construct a public (or semi-public) profile and display a list of other users with whom they share a social connection. In addition, these sites have created innovative communication channels, such as posting comments on individuals 'walls' and 'tagging' pictures, offering new ways for individuals to communicate with their online networks (BASW, 2012).

3. - The benefits of using social media

Social media can enable the College to better understand and respond to its key audiences. Social media can:

1. Increase our access to audiences and widen the range of our communication.
2. Improve the long-term cost-effectiveness of communication through free, popular channels of communication that people already value. There are no service charges to use social networking or blog sites, and communicating via social media cuts out printing, travel, phone and postal costs incurred by other media.
3. Target specific groups e.g. students, thereby contributing to the personalisation of messages and hence sustainability of the profession and the organisation.
4. Enable the College to be more active in its relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders.
5. Highlight membership benefits to non-members.
6. Promote the paramedic profession to the public.
7. Promote and encourage strategic partnerships (e.g. linking with companies and organisations via their Facebook or Twitter pages).
8. Enable the organisation to respond directly and openly to member queries and vice-versa.
9. Create dynamic content on the website (e.g. Flickr slideshows and Youtube videos can be easily added to web pages).
10. Enable member-to-member networking and communication.

The use of social media does not in itself constitute good practice. To be valuable, the use of social media must deliver some of the benefits listed above. A robust communication strategy needs to be consistent across all College media communications.

The College's Marketing Manager will manage the organisation's social media activities reporting to the Chief Executive in liaison with the Director of Communications.

4. - General guidance for staff/council members/regional groups

In using social media there are a number of ways to enhance utility or decrease risk.

Be an ambassador. Remember that you are an ambassador for the College. Use a professional profile separate from any personal profiles you might have. Make clear you are a College representative, give your job title, and connect your profile with other College profiles on the same channel.

Build working relationships. Accept all requests to link/follow from paramedics (whether members or non-members). Link to relevant professional profiles in your area of expertise. Respond and engage in two way communication.

Don't share member benefits with non-members. When sharing resources that are member benefits provide links to the relevant resource which only members will be able to access via web login. When appropriate promote College membership.

Discuss social media activity at team meetings. Talk about your specific successes, outcomes and challenges associated with using social media.

Be aware of your target audience and connect. If you have a message for a specific group, identify the staff member to relay the information to. For example, Jane Doe connects with student paramedics through social networks while John Doe connects with associate members and support staff through social networks. If you specialise in e.g. research, connect with research specialists and introduce yourself.

Be aware of your followers. Make an effort to understand why someone has added you as a Facebook friend or why someone is following you. All social networking sites allow private messaging so use this function if you want to discuss questions with someone in more detail.

Be professional. Your comments should always be fair, accurate, friendly and transparent. Participate in the same way that you would in other media or public forums, such as a conference or seminar.

Be clear about your responsibilities. Discuss your social media activity with the chief executive, communications officer and other College staff who are using social media. Do not make commitments on behalf of College if you are not authorised to do so.

Be responsive. When you gain insight into what works well in social media, share it with colleagues. When someone asks you a question or makes a comment, try to respond or refer the person to where they could get an answer.

Communicate important messages e.g. calls to action. Seek further support. If you are in need for further assistance then you should seek help for the Marketing Manager.

5. - Guidance for staff/council members on asking and responding to questions

Enabling members to communicate with each other is integral to our goal of encouraging paramedics to engage with other paramedics, other professions, and promote the profession. Enabling members to communicate with each other is one of the benefits of membership which members pay for.

1. Answer questions that relate to your own responsibilities.
2. Refer questions outside your responsibilities to the relevant member of staff.
3. Ask open questions relevant to your position which enable satisfying communication e.g. 'What are you doing about your CPD this year?'
4. Respond professionally to negative comments e.g. 'User: The College doesn't care about CPD!' 'College staff/council member: We do value members CPD, there is a range of resources on our website (link) and we support regions to provide regular CPD sessions for staff in their area.'
5. Avoid using social media channels to ask 'What do you think of the College of Paramedics?'

6. - Guidance for managers

If you line manage someone who is engaged in social media:

1. Set up a profile on all channels on which your staff member is present: this is the quickest and best way to understand the benefits social media are delivering for their objectives.
2. Incorporate social media as a standing item in one-to-one meetings.
3. Discuss relevant sections of the guidance document with the staff member.
4. Encourage reflection on social media activity e.g. 'what worked well? What would you do differently next time?'
5. Discuss any concerns as soon as possible in order to ensure inappropriate usage is avoided and managed swiftly.
6. Discuss social media in team meetings as a possible tool for appropriate work streams.
7. Avoid complex and unnecessary reporting procedure.
8. Check in with the Director of Communications for clarification.

7. - Recent social media successes

- New content distribution by way of multiple social media channels, resulted in an increase of 5000 Twitter followers and 4000 Facebook fans over a one year period.
- The College now has a presence on YouTube.
- The combination of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) on the website and Social Media Optimisation (SMO) across social media channels has resulted in the organisation appearing as the 3rd Google entry of 11.6 million + results for a search with 'paramedics'.
- The College now engages directly with the membership by posting live updates during its Council meeting and AGM along with conference and CPD events.

8. - Managing risk – communication

As part of a broader communication strategy the College should identify those subjects that are of particular value because they support business priorities and strategic goals. Sufficient flexibility is also necessary so that College staff/council members can respond to, and engage in, conversation about topical issues relating to the profession.

Ultimately regional social media activity should be the responsibility of the regional Chair. All concerns should be reported directly to the Marketing Manager and/or the Director of Communications.

The College is clear about what subjects are off limits. These subjects include:

1. Confidential information. [A Code of Ethics for College staff and members is in the process of being developed]
2. Financial information.
3. Disputes internal to the College.
4. Current legal proceedings.
5. Personal information (anyone's).
6. Non-factual information.
7. Anything which could bring the organisation or the profession into disrepute.
8. Anything that reduces incentive to join as a member.

College staff/council members with expertise in particular areas may be contacted by media contacts via social media channels. If staff/council members that are not usually approached by the press as part of their job are asked for quotable comment this should be discussed with the Director of Communications prior to response.

College staff/council members who are talking to the media as a regular part of their responsibilities should remember that social media comments are public and quotable and apply the same standards of professional responsibility that they would bring to interaction with the press, TV, etc.

From time to time College staff/council members might make mistaken comments in good faith e.g. giving the wrong title of a publication. Mistakes should be acknowledged and rectified as soon as possible.

9. - Managing risk - negative comments about the College of Paramedics

A healthy organisation can deal constructively with criticism. However, it should be born in mind that the majority of comments on our social media channels are supportive.

People should deal with criticisms in a professional and appropriate manner and follow these steps:

1. Do not delete criticisms as this provokes accusations of censorship and looks defensive.
2. Don't take the criticism personally.
3. Keep your language simple and conversational.
4. Aim to reply within 24 hours of noticing the criticism where possible.
5. Inform the communications director
6. Don't respond immediately if the comment has triggered your emotions, consult with other council members first.
7. Supply any relevant information which might address the issue, or link to the appropriate information on the College website.
8. Speak to the Communications Officer, Chief Executive or your line manager if in doubt about how to proceed.

When using social media negative comments or criticism is always a possibility. This has to be viewed as a two-way process of communication and the College must be prepared to monitor and respond to, if appropriate, these sorts of comments. An example may be a member having problems with the website and not being able to successfully book onto a CPD event. This could be resolved by reporting it to the administration team who can make contact with the individual to resolve the issue.

10. - Managing risk - inappropriate comments made by users

On social networking sites like Facebook, the responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social network itself. Consequently the College should not need to duplicate these measures against e.g. illegal or harmful and offensive content.

However some sites such as Flickr give the rights to moderate and comment on user content to the Administrator of each group. This means that College staff or council members that create a group on any site need to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as Administrator and have a strategy for monitoring and dealing with inappropriate content. (BBC-Online)

Retweeting

You may wish to consider forwarding or "retweeting" a selection of a person's microblog entries/posts or "tweets". This is very unlikely to be a problem when you are "retweeting" a colleague's College of Paramedics "tweet". But in some cases, you will need to consider the risk that "retweeting" of third party content by the College may appear to be an endorsement of the original author's point of view.

It may not be enough to write on your College microblog's biography page that "retweeting" does not signify endorsement, particularly if the views expressed are about politics or a matter of controversial public policy. Instead you should consider adding your own comment to the "tweet" you have selected, making it clear why you are forwarding it and where you are speaking in your own voice and where you are quoting someone else's (BBC-online)

If you see an inappropriate comment in College forums:

1. Inform the facilitator of the forum who will delete the comment and block the user if appropriate.

If you see an inappropriate comment on one of our social media channels:

1. Inform the facilitator of the forum who will delete the comment and block the user if appropriate.
2. The facilitator, or the person identifying the inappropriate comment if the facilitator is not available should make contact with the administration team who will refer on to the Director of Communications.

11. - Branding consistency

A robust and consistent branding needs to be used across all College of Paramedic's official social media channels, including displaying the official logo and corporate colour. URLs (web addresses) need to be customised to appear as 'collegeofparamedics' (i.e. Facebook.com/collegeofparamedics and Twitter.com/collegeofparamedics).

When written in full the organisation should be identified in its social media channels as the College of Paramedics, which is then identified consistently across all channels as 'the professional body for the paramedic profession in the UK'.

Company overview in social media channels should always refer to the copy on the page on the website entitled About College of Paramedics

College staff avatars (profile pictures) and profiles should reflect professional images and role information present on the corporate contact page.

12. - References

The College of Paramedics would like to thank the British Association of Occupational Therapists and College of Occupational Therapists (BAOT/COT), for allowing this guide to be primarily built around their 2010 social media guidance, with additional input from the other references listed.

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