



Social Media User Guidance - Members

College of Paramedics

Date of Policy approval by the Governing Council
Date for Policy review

5th February 2015
January 2017

© Copyright 2015 College of Paramedics

Social Media User Guidance – Members

Contents

Contents.....	2
Summary	3
1. – Purpose.....	3
2. – Context.....	4
3. – Definition of social media	4
4. – Professional development.....	5
5. – Employment issues.....	5
6. - Legal, regulatory and professional perspectives.....	6
6.1 Legal considerations.....	6
6.1.1 Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure.....	6
6.1.2 Defamation.....	6
6.1.3 Equalities, diversity and harassment.....	6
6.2 Regulatory considerations – Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).....	6
6.3 Professional considerations	7
6.3.1 Maintaining professional boundaries.....	7
6.3.2 Consent	7
7. - Professional use of social media - the dos and don'ts	8
8. - Useful sites/papers	9
Use of social media.....	9
Research and teaching support.....	9
References	10
Citing:.....	10
Further References	10

Summary

The purpose of the College of Paramedics Social Media User Guidance - College Members is to provide advice on how to develop appropriate behaviour in relation to the personal and professional use of social media. It aims to increase members' understanding of the legal, regulatory and professional framework within which the use of social media sits and the potential consequences, both personal and professional, of its inappropriate use.

Social media provides both benefits and challenges; paramedics both nationally and internationally can share knowledge and information, debate critical issues and keep up to date with developments in practice. However being aware of potential pitfalls is essential; social media is not peer reviewed for instance and the maintaining of professional and personal boundaries can be challenging.

Legal, regulatory and professional considerations apply to paramedics as Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) or students when using social media. What you make public about your personal life on social media sites could have an impact on your employment and professional standing. Inappropriate comments written and shared have potential to breach a number of laws or regulations; from data protection, defamation or harassment laws to HCPC or employer regulations.

Social media is a public domain and you should be aware that while on-line you are still representing the profession and your employer and should be aware of how you could be viewed by society/service users/colleagues/other agencies/the media/ governing bodies. There are increasing numbers of paramedics being involved in social networking disciplinary cases; the internet is not anonymous, nor does it forget. Everything written on the internet can be traced back to its author very easily and there is a permanent record which is accessible to all.

This guidance concludes with a list of dos and don'ts for effective and responsible use of social media while avoiding negative personal or professional consequences. There are also some useful websites and papers listed.

1. – Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to clarify what the College of Paramedics considers to be the professional responsibilities of paramedics and paramedic students, in relation to the increasing use of social media. It provides advice on how to develop appropriate behaviour in relation to personal and professional use of this technology and understand the personal and professional consequences of the inappropriate use of social media.

The guidance also explores the relevant legal, regulatory, and professional framework which determines the appropriate use of social media in the health and social care context.

The guidance is primarily for members of the College of Paramedics but can also be useful to non-members, employers and education and training providers.

The guidance will need to be updated as the dynamic nature of social media evolves and will therefore be reviewed regularly, the College website will enable access to the latest advice and guidance.

The College of Paramedics strongly recommends that employers have a strategy, policy and code of practice for paramedics in relation to social media, which is proactive and supports professional development and discussion.

2. – Context

As well as providing many benefits, social media also presents challenges for professionals, as it can blur the boundaries between personal and professional life. Certain sites like Facebook employ 'privacy settings' allowing some control of who can view postings. However social media sites are very rarely completely closed or secure. Inappropriate use of social media could have drastic consequences for your reputation, and could negatively impact on your professional status and employment prospects.

The use of social media is set to expand. Many people, not just younger people, now expect to use social media to interact with each other. Modern health professionals now need to find ways to embrace this social media technology to help deliver innovative services, whilst upholding their professional, legal and regulatory responsibilities.

The use of social technology and social networking enables people to collaborate, build relationships and share information and resources. E-professionalism is a term that is starting to be used, which goes beyond online communication. It involves the ability to understand and use social media and also how to develop and manage online personas including online postings and interactions, blogs, images, videos, tweets, and more.

Social media is a public domain and you should be aware that while on-line you are still representing the profession and your employer and should be aware of how you could be viewed by society/service users/colleagues/other agencies/the media/governing bodies. There are increasing numbers of paramedics being involved in social networking disciplinary cases; the internet is not anonymous, nor does it forget. Everything written on the internet can be traced back to its author very easily and there is a permanent record which is accessible to all.

3. – 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.

The use of social media has exploded in the last few years. Its popularity can be attributed to the;

- Immediacy of communication,
- Relative ease of broadcasting messages to specific audiences,
- Level of interactivity providing a rich user/learner experience,
- Ease of connecting regularly with people who share similar interests or concerns,
- Level of personalisation that can be applied to reflect how an individual wants to receive information.

4. – Professional development

The evolution of social media has enabled paramedics across the world to share knowledge and information, debate critical issues, and connect with others who share interests. It is likely to increasingly help paramedics keep up-to-date with developments in paramedical science, practice and related professional issues, contributing to the development of paramedic's professional identity as an international profession.

Paramedics should make use of the potential for continuing professional development (CPD) through social media, for example by accessing learning materials, through online discussions and information sharing. Within the current fast-evolving socio-economic and policy contexts, it is important to keep abreast of relevant developments in pre-hospital care and related professions; social media can facilitate this process.

However you need to be aware of the benefits and pitfalls of using social media for learning, for example social media is not peer reviewed so some information may be misleading or inaccurate.

The College believes that good practice in social media is no different from that in any other form of communication. You should ensure you maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries and take responsibility for recognising ethical dilemmas presented by the use of different types of social media.

5. – Employment issues

ACAS recommends that employers draw up (with staff and trade union representatives) a policy to cover the use of social media sites, and that the policy is clear about what organisational monitoring will take place. An approach adopted by some organisations is to have a corporate social media presence such as a Facebook page or Twitter account which certain staff are trained to manage or moderate. Staff are then asked to keep separate their personal Facebook or Twitter accounts.

You should always check your employer's policy on the use of social media, and ensure that you comply with this to avoid being in breach of your employment contract (and associated terms and conditions). Falling foul of such a policy could mean being called to account under an employer's disciplinary policy, and could have implications for continued employment.

Many organisations advise their staff not to say where they work on their personal social media accounts to ensure clear boundaries. The TUC recommends that employers negotiate a reasonable conduct policy which would highlight to staff what is expected of employees both at work and in their private lives (online and offline).

6. - Legal, regulatory and professional perspectives

Legal, regulatory and professional considerations apply to you as health professional or student when using social media – in the same way as they do when you are using other forms of communication, or sharing information. What you make public about your personal life on social media sites could have an impact on your employment and professional standing.

Remember that even if stringent privacy settings are used in social media; effectively everything said or posted can easily and quickly be made public and seen by a wide audience.

6.1 Legal considerations

The informality and speed at which information can be communicated via social media increases the risk of breaking the law. Several areas of the law are particularly relevant when considering the use of social media.

6.1.1 Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure

The Data Protection Act 1998 regulates the use of information about living individuals, and provides the framework for ensuring the privacy, and appropriate disclosure of, 'personal' and 'sensitive personal' data. Social networking sites make it easy to upload and share information which may compromise patient confidentiality. So it is important to consider whether your action(s) may breach the act BEFORE you post anything online. If in doubt, don't post.

6.1.2 Defamation

If using social media, first consider what you are writing and communicating. Written content has the potential to be considered defamatory (libellous). You as the author – and also possibly your employer – could find yourselves open to a defamation case. Remember – there is a marked distinction between sharing your views or opinions in a constructive manner, with knowingly disregarding the truth when discussing an individual online. Defamation takes place if the comment harms the reputation of the individual.

6.1.3 Equalities, diversity and harassment

Racist, sexist, homophobic comments, harassment, or bullying using social media will also breach the various laws that protect individuals from this inappropriate behaviour. Again legal action may be taken against the perpetrator using the online posting as evidence.

6.2 Regulatory considerations – Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

The HCPC does not have specific guidance about social media, but makes the point that when registrants use social media, they need to do so within the relevant Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (which are mandatory for all registrants);

- registrants must act in the best interests of service users,
- registrants must respect the confidentiality of service users,
- registrants must keep high standards of personal conduct,
- registrants must behave with honesty and integrity and make sure that your behaviour does not damage the public's confidence in you or your profession.

The HCPC guidance on consent and ethics for students articulates similar principles.

6.3 Professional considerations

'Professionalism' embodies a set of values and behaviours that have evolved over time and that are practised consistently. Professionalism is about acknowledging personal responsibility for professional actions and striving for quality service delivery; this includes recognising that actions in your personal life can impact on your professional standing. When using social media, you will want to consider your 'digital professionalism' – your professional conduct when interacting with colleagues or friends in the digital world. You should share information appropriately and be responsible for what is posted, using your professional judgment. When tweeting or blogging about a topic related to the profession or work, you should consider the effect of your comments on your reputation and that of your employer.

6.3.1 Maintaining professional boundaries

As the scope and range of paramedic practice develops increasing numbers of paramedics will be working in such environments as walk in centres or providing telephone advice. Therefore the issue of maintaining professional boundaries with patients is appropriate to consider in the context of professionalism and social media. It is the responsibility of health professionals to establish and maintain clear boundaries with patients. The College recommends the following action, now or in the future, to ensure such boundaries are maintained;

- Set any social media personal account privacy settings high to ensure you have protected yourself against inappropriate advances from patients/clients,
- Don't respond to requests from patients to befriend you via your personal account; click the decline option giving no reason,
- Don't send 'friend' requests to current or former patients/clients,
- If using social media as part of your service (for example – a live 'chat' consultation with a patient), ensure your communication is professional and maintains appropriate boundaries,
- Report any obscene correspondence (to your manager or supervisor) rather than replying to it.

6.3.2 Consent

The ease with which images, video clips and information can be shared across social networking sites means that it is important to be clear from the outset about how pieces of information will be used. If there is an intention to create a resource that will be shared via social media, consent needs to be gained from the patient and health professional involved.

7. - Professional use of social media - the dos and don'ts

Do use social media effectively and responsibly:

- Think about why you want to use social media, what you want to say, to whom, how and why;
- Avoid jargon or abbreviations to ensure your audience will understand what you are trying to say;
- Ensure your contributions are based on fact/evidence;
- Set privacy settings to ensure only known or invited individuals can access your social media;
- Get written consent from patients before using images on social media sites;
- Recognise that everything you post online contributes to building a digital record about yourself (which may not easily be deleted);
- Be transparent if contributing to social media sites in a work or official capacity;
- Respect the 'house rules' of the social media site (terms of use etc);
- Adjust your communication style on social networking sites which are usually informal in nature;
- Remember, if being photographed or being featured in a video clip, be professional in dress and manner;
- Remember to take a proportional approach if you have to tackle negative or inappropriate comments on social networking sites. Try to solve the issue informally if appropriate. If this does not solve the matter or the original posting is serious enough to warrant moving straight to a more formal approach, refer on to the appropriate individual or organisation. For example, for an advertising issue go to the Advertising Standards Authority <http://www.asa.org.uk/>. For a dispute between colleagues seek advice from your workplace steward, or from Human Resources or Management. If you are worried about a breach of patient confidentiality, discuss it with management.

To avoid negative personal or professional consequences when using social media don't:

- Assume your contributions to social networking sites are private. Even if you have employed privacy settings, friends or followers can forward items outside your network and make them public;
- Post any comment or image you would not be happy to see on the BBC news;
- State your place of work on your personal Facebook/Twitter account (unless you have permission to do so);
- Use social media to criticise a colleague, manager or employer;
- Use social networking sites to whistle blow. Use HCPC guidance on this topic instead;
- Breach patient or employer confidentiality;
- Accept friend requests from patients;
- Send friend requests to patients;
- Gossip about colleagues, patients, your employer etc;
- Violate intellectual property law (e.g. copyright or trademark);
- Harass anyone, or discriminate against anyone in your postings;
- Speak on behalf of people or organisations without their express permission;
- Escalate situations by getting into a war of words online; bear in mind social networking sites are public spaces.

'Stop and think' social media checklist:

- Does your contribution positively promote your role as a paramedic, or student?
- Does your contribution reflect positively on your co-workers/colleagues?
- Does your contribution conflict with your employer's mission, culture, values and/or policies?
- Does your contribution reveal confidential patient or proprietary business information?
- Does your contribution include any information that could directly or indirectly identify a patient under your care?
- Do you understand how the social media you are using works, including the privacy settings?

8. - Useful sites/papers

Use of social media

<http://nhssm.org.uk/about/>

This resource supports NHS staff to learn about social media, share ideas and experiences.

Research and teaching support

Mollett A, Moran D, Dunleavy P. Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities. London: London School of Economics and Political Science; 2011.

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/38489/>

This resource explains what Twitter is, how to set up an account, the different styles of utilising Twitter (pros and cons), and how to make the best use of it for research and teaching purposes.

References

The College of Paramedics would like to thank the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) for allowing this guidance to be primarily built around their 2012 Social Media Guidance. The CSP recently discontinued their 2012 guidance due to the introduction of new guidance that can be found on their website <http://www.csp.org.uk/>

The College of Paramedics would also like to thank the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), for the use of their 2012 Social Media Policy in building this guidance:

British Association of Social Workers (2012) Social Media Policy, British Association of Social Workers. Available from: www.basw.co.uk [Accessed October 2014]

Citing:

D. Boyd and N. Ellison, Social Networking sites: Definition, History and Scholarship (2008) *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* pp 210-30. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x/pdf>

Claudia Megele 'Social care in the e-professionalism era' 25-4-12 www.guardian.co.uk/social-care-network/2012/apr/25/e-professionalism-social-care

Claudia Megele 'Social Media, Social Learning and Education + CPD' 30-10-2012 (originally published in Compass) <http://swscmedia.wordpress.com/2012/10/30/social-media-social-learning-and-education-cpd-by-claudia-megele-originally-published-in-compass/>

Further References

Data Protection Act 1998 Chapter 29. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29>

Health and Care Professions Council. Professionalism in healthcare professionals. London: Health and Care Professions Council; 2011. <http://www.hpc-uk.org/publications/research/index.asp?id=511>

Health and Care Professions Council. Focus on standards – social networking sites. In Focus newsletter. 2011 April; 34: 3. <http://www.hpc-uk.org/publications/newsletter/index.asp?id=467>

Health Care Professions Council. Guidance on conduct and ethics for students. London: Health and Care Professions Council; 2009 <http://www.hpc-uk.org/publications/index.asp?id=219#publicationSearchResults>

Health and Care Professions Council. Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. London: Health and Care Professions Council; 2008. <http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/>

Labour Research Department. Social media, monitoring and surveillance at work: a practical guide for trade unionists. London: Labour Research Department; 2012.

Social Media User Guidance – Summary

At a Glance

The purpose of the College of Paramedics Social Media User Guidance - College Members is to provide advice on how to develop appropriate behaviour in relation to the personal and professional use of social media. It aims to increase members' understanding of the legal, regulatory and professional framework within which the use of social media sits and the potential consequences, both personal and professional, of its inappropriate use.

Social media provides both benefits and challenges; paramedics both nationally and internationally can share knowledge and information, debate critical issues and keep up to date with developments in practice. However being aware of potential pitfalls is essential; social media is not peer reviewed for instance and the maintaining of professional and personal boundaries can be challenging.

Legal, regulatory and professional considerations apply to paramedics as allied health professionals or students when using social media. What you make public about your personal life on social media sites could have an impact on your employment and professional standing. Inappropriate comments written and shared have potential to breach a number of laws or regulations; from data protection, defamation or harassment laws to HCPC or employer regulations.

Social media is a public domain and you should be aware that while on-line you are still representing the profession and your employer and should be aware of how you could be viewed by society/service users/colleagues/other agencies/the media/ governing bodies. There are increasing numbers of paramedics being involved in social networking disciplinary cases; the internet is not anonymous, nor does it forget. Everything written on the internet can be traced back to its author very easily and there is a permanent record which is accessible to all.

The following is a list of dos and don'ts for effective and responsible use of social media while avoiding negative personal or professional consequences.

Do use social media effectively and responsibly:

- Think about why you want to use social media, what you want to say, to whom, how and why;
- Avoid jargon or abbreviations to ensure your audience will understand what you are trying to say;
- Ensure your contributions are based on fact/evidence;
- Set privacy settings to ensure only known or invited individuals can access your social media;
- Get written consent from patients before using images on social media sites;
- Recognise that everything you post online contributes to building a digital record about yourself (which may not easily be deleted);
- Be transparent if contributing to social media sites in a work or official capacity;
- Respect the 'house rules' of the social media site (terms of use etc);
- Adjust your communication style on social networking sites which are usually informal in nature;
- Remember, if being photographed or being featured in a video clip, be professional in dress and manner;

- Remember to take a proportional approach if you have to tackle negative or inappropriate comments on social networking sites. Try to solve the issue informally if appropriate. If this does not solve the matter or the original posting is serious enough to warrant moving straight to a more formal approach, refer on to the appropriate individual or organisation. For example, for an advertising issue go to the Advertising Standards Authority <http://www.asa.org.uk/>. For a dispute between colleagues seek advice from your workplace steward, or from Human Resources or Management. If you are worried about a breach of patient confidentiality, discuss it with management.

To avoid negative personal or professional consequences when using social media don't:

- Assume your contributions to social networking sites are private. Even if you have employed privacy settings, friends or followers can forward items outside your network and make them public;
- Post any comment or image you would not be happy to see on the BBC news;
- State your place of work on your personal Facebook/Twitter account (unless you have permission to do so);
- Use social media to criticise a colleague, manager or employer;
- Use social networking sites to whistle blow. Use HCPC guidance on this topic instead;
- Breach patient or employer confidentiality;
- Accept friend requests from patients;
- Send friend requests to patients;
- Gossip about colleagues, patients, your employer etc;
- Violate intellectual property law (e.g. copyright or trademark);
- Harass anyone, or discriminate against anyone in your postings;
- Speak on behalf of people or organisations without their express permission;
- Escalate situations by getting into a war of words online; bear in mind social networking sites are public spaces.

'Stop and think' social media checklist:

- Does your contribution positively promote your role as a paramedic or student?
- Does your contribution reflect positively on your co-workers/colleagues?
- Does your contribution conflict with your employer's mission, culture, values and/or policies?
- Does your contribution reveal confidential patient or proprietary business information?
- Does your contribution include any information that could directly or indirectly identify a patient under your care?
- Do you understand how the social media you are using works, including the privacy settings?