Guidance on using social media

Social networking sites and other social media can be an effective and entertaining way of communicating.

4.2.3 of *Standards for the Dental Team* states:
'You must not post any information or comments about patients on social networking or blogging sites. If you use professional social media to discuss anonymised cases for the purpose of discussing best practice you must be careful that the patient or patients cannot be identified.'

Social media covers a number of internet based tools which allow people to create and exchange content. It includes blogs, internet forums, content communities and social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, LinkedIn, GDPUK, Instagram and Pinterest.

When using social media, you must:

a. Maintain and protect patients' information by not publishing any information which could identify them on social media without their explicit consent.

b. Maintain appropriate boundaries in the relationships you have with patients.

c. Comply with any internet and social media policy set out by your employer.

As a registrant you have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly both online and offline. Your online image can impact on your professional life and you should not post any information, including photographs and videos, which could bring the profession into disrepute.

It is important to remember that anything you post on social media is in the public domain and can be easily copied and redistributed without your knowledge. You should presume that everything that you share online will be there permanently.

You should think carefully before accepting friend requests from patients.

You should regularly review your privacy settings to ensure that information is not accessed by unintended audiences. However, you should remember that even the strictest privacy settings do not guarantee that your information will be kept secure and any information that you post could be viewed by anyone including your patients, colleagues or employer.

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You should remember that even if you do not identify yourself as a dental professional, you could still put your registration at risk if you display inappropriate behaviour whilst using social media.

You should not have discussions with your patients about their dental care and treatments on social media.

While online discussions about anonymised patients and best practice can have an educational and professional benefit you should remember that posting information under another username does not guarantee your confidentiality. You should consider how your comments reflect on you as well as how they could impact on the public's trust in the profession.

If you believe patients are being put at risk by a colleague's conduct, behaviour or decision-making, or by your working environment you should seek advice from your employer, defence organisation, professional association or Public Concern at Work. Principle 8 in *Standards for the Dental Team* has further guidance on raising concerns. Social media should only be used to raise concerns as a last resort

You must not use social media as a mechanism to raise concerns about the possible abuse of children or vulnerable adults. These concerns must be referred to the appropriate authority such as your local Social Services Department.

You may find it helpful to contact your professional association or indemnifier for further guidance on the responsible use of social media.

Effective from 30 September 2013