



Faculty of Medicine and Health Social Media Guidance for Staff, Students and PGRs

Introduction

This guidance aims to **help you use social media responsibly**. It is hard to cover every social media situation you may face, but these broad principles with practical examples should enable you to think through issues and act professionally; helping you to protect your own reputation and that of the University and placement providers and partners, whilst also ensuring public protection.

Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in **social networking**. This can include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok (for example), internet forums (such as doctors.net, GitHub and Code4Health and internal platforms such as Yammer) and chat apps like WhatsApp and SnapChat.

Using social media has **blurred the boundaries between public and private life**, and online information can be easily accessed by others. You should regularly **review the privacy settings** for each of your social media profiles. Be mindful of any @ tags you use in your biography and the associations this brings. Remember that absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed - even content in private groups or channels can be captured via screen shot and shared more widely.

Tip:

Think about location tags. Could you be accidentally revealing the home location / address details of yourself or others that could place you or them at risk?

Benefits of social media

Social media has **significant benefits**, including the ability to build and maintain national and international **professional networks**; **engage people** in public health and policy discussions; and **facilitate access to information** about health and services.

It's a great way to **celebrate the health care profession** you have chosen to study. But it isn't for everyone, so if you don't feel comfortable using it, don't feel pressured by hearing others talk about how they use social media.

Tips to help build a professional social media presence:

- Follow people in your area of interest who use social media in a positive way – see what they do and apply it to your approach, comment on or share their content
- Post regularly – this helps to build your profile and underpin your professional integrity and reliability
- Be generous – tag others with relevant links (with permission) and don't just talk about yourself all the time
- Keep up to date with changes on the channels you use (or could use) so you take advantage of new and useful features
- Keep your content focused and then you can be known for being an expert in a specific area e.g. emergency medicine, child health

Using social media

Treat other users with **fairness and respect**. Think before you post: Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it important? Is it necessary? Is it kind? What is the source of information you are sharing, and is it credible / backed-up? Try to avoid unfair criticism, don't share information that could be misleading, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't change previous posts without indicating that you have done so.

Consider the language you use; aim to be inclusive and accessible, especially when you offer guidance or advice. Use simple language and explain any complex points – particularly if you think your intended audience would benefit from an explanation.

Be respectful and remember the profession / employer you are representing or could be linked to. Avoid inappropriate behaviours and language, such as intimidation, bullying or discrimination.

Your use of social media should never compromise your **professionalism or your reputation, or damage public confidence** in you as a higher education, healthcare or social care professional. Even if you don't clearly state that you work or study at Leeds, it may be possible to link you to the University via the content you share and other users you interact with.

Be mindful that what you may see as 'normal', acceptable or humorous may be **interpreted differently** by others. **If you're not sure; don't post it.** This is about what you say and the images you use, including how you are dressed. Be aware of examples when historical content resurfaces that may be judged differently in the present day, compared to when it was originally posted.

For example ...

Dr Joshua Wolrich (@drjoshuawolrich) works full-time in the NHS and via social media fights against weight stigma and weight discrimination. He regularly busts nutrition myths and dismantles the diet culture often present on social media.

Maintain **sensible boundaries**. Never reference patients or their care on social media. Don't accept friend requests from patients, clients or service users.

Always check before posting **images that feature other people**; be that students, staff or wider clinical colleagues or those from partner organisations.

Public attitudes indicate it is good practice for students and staff to change at work or cover their uniforms as they travel to and from work, so **avoid posting images in uniform** outside of clinical areas. You should **seek permission before posting images in University buildings, clinical facilities or when on placement** and check local social media guidance first.

Be mindful that **'liking' or sharing content posted by others** can suggest you agree with their point of view. When sharing appropriate content, make sure you credit the original source.

What to do if you need help or advice?

If in doubt, students / PGRs can seek guidance from personal tutors, programme leads or Student Support Services. Members of staff should speak to their line manager or head of service.

You should always **seek advice** if someone you know is behaving inappropriately on social media or you have a **safety or safeguarding concern**.

You can also contact the Faculty of Medicine and Health Communications and Engagement Team by email: fmhcomms@leeds.ac.uk

For example ...

Dr Alex (@dralexgeorge) came to fame by being on ITV's *Love Island* programme and is now making a name for himself as a TV doctor. He worked in A&E during the pandemic and gives his 2 million followers regular updates on his experience, as well as educational videos on his YouTube channel.

He talks a lot about mental health and whilst you might occasionally see him without a top on, he doesn't flaunt his body; he uses it in context to his posts about body positivity, the value of embracing bodily imperfections and the benefits of exercise.

For example ...

Dr Anita Mitra (@gynaegeek) is an NHS gynaecologist who uses social media to talk about gynaecological matters, sharing evidence-based facts and advice. Her focus is on ending shame to encourage and empower women to seek medical help when needed. She has a warm personality and light-hearted approach to a difficult subject.

For example ...

Dr Frankie Jackson-Spence (@drfrankiejs) is an NHS doctor who offers advice and tips on a range of general health topics. She also shares her daily exercise regime and half marathon training.

She often appears in workout gear or can be seen in a bikini, with the context aligned to her focus on the benefits of exercise and healthy eating and taking time to rest and recharge.

Alignment with University of Leeds policies and procedures

This guidance document may be used in conjunction with or with reference to wider policies and documents in use across the Faculty of Medicine and Health and the wider University.

This includes, but is not limited to, student fitness to practice standards and related documentation, and policies including those on [Policy on Dignity and Mutual Respect](#) and [Use of Computer Systems policy](#). Action may be taken if it is considered that staff or students use of social media is considered inappropriate in line with these, or other, policies.

Further reference and reading

In preparing these guidelines, reference has been made to similar publications by relevant professional bodies with whom staff and students may be registered, or may be seeking future registration:

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, [Guidance on the Use of Social Media](#)

British Association of Social Workers, [Social Media Policy](#)

British Psychological Society, [Supplementary guidance on the use of social media](#)

General Pharmaceutical Council, [Demonstrating professionalism online](#)

Health and Care Professions Council, [Communication and Using Social Media](#)

General Dental Council, [Guidance on using social media](#)

General Medical Council, [Doctors' use of social media](#)

Nursing and Midwifery Council; [Social media guidance](#)

Social Work England, [Professional standards guidance](#)

UK Council for Psychotherapy, [Security and Confidentiality Guidelines](#)

And remember ...

You are not, and will never be, everyone's cup of tea.

You will gather supporters and critics through your use of social media, particularly if you have a fully visible, public profile and are working to build your online presence.

The key is to define your values from the start and always post content aligned with your values, the professional reputation you wish to protect, and your own integrity.

Review

This document will be reviewed 6 months' following initial publication; and annually thereafter.

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