



Factsheet No.44

Social Media & GP Practices

Top Tips and Cautionary Tales!



"Does our practice need a Facebook Page?"

*"A social media post is for life...
Not just for Christmas!"*

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Should your practice be on Twitter? What about Facebook? Questions raised at many practice meetings. Before you dip your toe into the social media world, read Sandeep Saib's top tips and plan ahead.



Social media is the future of communication and it is rapidly changing the face of healthcare, impacting the way this sector interacts locally, nationally and globally.

So what is Social Media? It is a collective of online communications channels, dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. It includes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Pinterest, Vimeo etc. The different types of social media channels used in the healthcare sector attracts specific audiences for different purposes.

So what benefits might social media offer your practice? Reaching and communicating with your patients and the wider local community, engaging in health-related discussions and networks, and increase awareness of the various healthcare services available. **However, using social media also carries potential risks.** It can be detrimental to the practices' reputation as well as both the patient and public's trust and confidence in the practice.

"60% of doctors say social media improves the quality of care delivered to patients."

(Source: Demi & Cooper Advertising and DC Interactive Group)

"31% of health care professionals use social media for professional networking."

(Source: MedTechMedia)

Top Tips for GP practices

- * Anything posted on social media is immediately in the public domain and can be copied and re-distributed without the practice's knowledge or consent.
- * Think before you post. Everything that you share online will be there permanently and widely available. *A social media 'post' is for life not just for Christmas!*
- * When posting information, ensure that all content has a connection with or is referenced to your practice. It also needs to be reviewed and finalised BEFORE being posted online.

- * When communicating or advertising your healthcare services publicly, all healthcare professionals must:
 - maintain and protect patient confidentiality
 - treat colleagues fairly and with respect
 - ensure the information published is factual and checked
 - maintain a professional boundary between your practice and your patient
 - ensure the practices' conduct justifies your patients' as well as the public's trust in the overall profession and what you stand for
 - be aware of conflicts of interest which may arise from published posts
 - not exploit patients' vulnerability or lack of medical knowledge

Practice Team Recommendations

1. For larger practices, set up a clear social media policy and guidelines. Update it frequently, share with your team and enforce it.
2. It may not be necessary for smaller practices to have a written social media policy in place. However, please do note the points outlined below.
3. Staff must make it clear in personal posts that they are speaking on own behalf.
4. Differentiate between personal vs. professional. Posts made in employee's own time can still impact the practice and its reputation.
5. Adequate training around social media for staff and managers is required, so they are aware of the standards and processes in place.
6. Promptly respond to any issues of harassment, discrimination etc. from social media activity.
7. It is also good practice to have one individual to be responsible for overseeing and managing the overall social media activity within your practice, so everything is streamlined.

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