About this resource

Social media is the fastest growing communication method of the 21st century, so with this in mind, the British Dietetic Association (BDA), your professional body and Trade Union, has developed this professional member guidance to ensure the profession is fully, effectively engaged.

This social media professional guidance document is designed to provide guidance to BDA members who are either currently, or would like to be, engaged in social media in a professional capacity.

It includes:

• an explanation of types of social media platforms
• a collection of practical tips and hints on professional approaches with social media for members of the BDA
• hypothetical examples relevant to the diverse areas in which dietitians and nutritionists work and communicate about food, nutrition and health

Students will find this resource useful, and it will have relevance to other health professionals, organisations and individuals. This document does not cover product endorsement, the BDA is producing a separate document to cover this area.

Acknowledgements

This resource is based on Dialling into the Digital Age: Guidance on social media for DDA members that was commissioned and developed by the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) to support DAA members engaged in the area of social media. We are grateful to the DAA for permission to reuse their resource.

Note: Thank you to Dean Royles for giving permission to use his Twitter account as an example in this document.
Welcome

Social media has been one of the fastest growing areas of the online world. So much so that there is now a vast and ever growing array of online communities where people come together to share knowledge, discuss ideas and debate matters.

In recent years, social platforms have become so ingrained in our behaviour that patients and service users are more informed, aware and empowered than ever before. At the touch of a button social media users have access to real time information and data from general ‘chit chat’ to high level policy and research.

In the online arena, Dietitians have a sizeable opportunity to make themselves recognised as the experts in nutrition whilst the social media platforms themselves act as vehicles to share robust nutritional science and innovation far and wide.

Whilst some BDA members are digitally savvy and forging ahead, others are keen to learn new skills and broaden their outlook to become part of the digital world.

Change means opportunities but also challenges.

We hope these updated guidelines and tips encourage you to embrace the digital age with confidence and professional integrity.

Dr Fiona McCullough
Chairman, BDA
Background - what is social media?

Before getting started, why not watch this fascinating four minute video, which gives you an insight into the power of social media. Just click on the left-hand icon to play.

Social media is simply sharing information online. We have always shared socially and in networks – talking face-to-face or over the phone with neighbours and friends – but the internet has allowed the net to be cast in an infinite arc – the networks in which we share are global, the information viral.

The communications environment has changed, and that change is here to stay. Perhaps the most significant change is a lack of privacy – what you say (and do) is public. More than 70% of the internet population use social networks in one form or another and 57% of people talk more online than in person.

Friends, relatives, colleagues and total strangers can all access your innermost thoughts if you decide to share them on the myriad of social media tools that are available. Even if you are yet to join the millions of people communicating in public, you will probably have heard of ‘blogging’, Facebook or Twitter.

1. Waddington, S ed. (2012) Share This: the social media handbook for PR professionals. Sussex: Wiley and Sons (pp. 3-4)
There are a number of different social media platforms – all used for different types of sharing:

**Microblogging**
An individual or group of users regularly record their views in a short form – for example, Twitter is just 140 characters (these can be captured on Storify or Conferize, showing everyone commenting on a particular topic).

**Blogging**
An individual or group of users regularly record their views in a long form, similar to an online diary – for example, Blogger, WordPress and Tumblr or posted on a company or personal website.

**Video sharing**
For example, YouTube and Vimeo.
Picture sharing
For example, Pinterest, Twitpic, Flickr, Instagram and SnapChat.

Audio sharing
Podcasts.

Social bookmarking
Instead of saving your favourite links [urls] to your web browser, you save them online and everyone else can see them, and you can see other peoples, like a recommendation list) – for example, Reddit and StumbleUpon.

Social sharing
For example, Facebook and Google+ and discussion forums.

Professional sharing
For example, LinkedIn and discussion forums like the BDA members forum.

This list is not exhaustive, and most platforms interact with each other – for example you can include bookmarks in your blog, send a tweet to invite people to read it, and also post it on your Facebook page and LinkedIn profile.²

BDA Social media presence
You can find and engage with the BDA on:

FACEBOOK
facebook.com/BritishDieteticAssociation
BDA public Facebook
facebook.com/groups/StudentDietitians
BDA Student Facebook

TWITTER
@BrDieteticAssoc
Our main account, with all the BDA in the news and other updates.

@BDA_Events
Our events account, the first place for BDA events updates, from annual conference to Group and Branch study days.

LINKEDIN
linkedin.com/groups?gid=1968119&trk=hb_side_g
If you are not a member, simply follow the links to request to join.

BDA MEMBERS DISCUSSION FORUM
bda.uk.com/discussion

The BDA has over 20 Specialist Group and Branch social media channels – for a complete list and to find those related to your speciality area or location visit the BDA website:

bda.uk.com
Don’t be antisocial

You will be more successful on social media if you publish positive, meaningful and respectful content. Remember that even if you post a nutrition comment as an individual, you are representing the profession as a whole, if easily identified as a dietitian.

These days most people’s workplace or professional details are just a couple of clicks or a Google search away. Negative comments intended in jest or with sarcasm, known as ‘snarks’, can easily be misinterpreted online. A comment you post in the heat of the moment can still appear in search engines years after you have cooled down. Aim to:

- Take time to listen and get to know a platform and community before you engage or start promoting your messages and content.
- Do not make remarks that are offensive, untruthful, threatening, discriminatory or demeaning. These can have far reaching repercussions.
- Respect diversity and remain appropriate and polite when disagreeing with others’ opinions.
- Pause and think before posting – is the communication channel appropriate for the message you are sending?
- Consider conducting a private, off-line conversation or direct message if you have an issue with a person or their content.
Don’t act or comment in a way that you wouldn’t in a professional meeting.

Regularly search for your name, practice or organisation online and assess the content that ranks highly. Contact anyone posting material about you that is inaccurate or inappropriate.

Project a positive image of what we do. Every dietitian plays an important role in the success of the profession and our public image.

‘Pay it forward’ - support your colleagues by sharing, commenting and promoting ‘favouriting’, ‘liking’ or ‘retweeting’ their expert content with acknowledgement. The success of one dietitian contributes to the success of many.

Correct any untruths – make sure you stick to the evidence rather than having an argument, ie post your correction and give a link to a better source of information such as academic studies.

Alcohol use, tiredness, stress and emotional situations reduce your inhibitions so beware.

Pause and think before posting – is the communication channel appropriate for the message you are sending?
Be a ‘scout’ for compliments and criticisms of The BDA. If you come across positive or negative remarks about The BDA through social media that you believe are important, forward them to pr@bda.uk.com

Be aware of BDA policies and guidelines on the scope and appropriate use of list serves (email groups) and the Association’s social media pages. Each platform also has its own guidelines for use which are useful and easy to find by doing a search on the respective website.

Maintain your obligation to the HCPC Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics and the BDA Code of Professional Conduct

Be familiar with the HCPC’s social media guidance and also any policies of your own employer or organisation.

Do not make remarks that are offensive, untruthful, threatening, discriminatory or demeaning. These can have far reaching repercussions.

If in doubt, contact the BDA Professional Development team at info@bda.uk.com
Maintain professional boundaries and privacy

Social media has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. For instance, many health professionals are unsure how to react when contacted by patients wanting to be Facebook friends. It’s important to maintain your privacy and that of your friends and family online, but you don’t have to avoid communication with patients, clients or the public.

There are many ways to set up separate private and professional social media profiles and pages. Make sure you still add your personality and “slice of life” insights to a professional platform – just be calculated about the content. Your friends and followers will more likely build a rapport, recommend and “like” you, if they feel they are engaged with a “real” person. Aim to:

# Set up professional platforms for all social media, such as a “professional” Facebook page, in addition to any personal accounts you hold. Your professional platform could be in your full name, a catchy handle like “nutritionguru” or that of your business or practice. Determine the scope of your “dual identities”.

# Keep your professional “brand” consistent across multiple platforms, this includes your personal email address if used for professional purposes.

# Lock the privacy settings for your personal accounts and consult with an IT expert to ensure these are maintained during social media site upgrades.

# Ensure you follow your employers’ guidance and policies in relation to social media.

# Never share private or personal information about your patients, clients, work or co-workers without consent. If sharing with consent, ensure full anonymity where necessary to maintain confidentiality.
Ensure that any patient or case study cannot be identified by the sum of information you post online, even if posted in different time periods or on different social media platforms.

Be choosy when adding geolocator to your updates or using check-in tools, like FourSquare or Facebook Places. You may be out at a private event and not wish to be identified. Or you may inadvertently reveal your home address, your children’s school or where you run alone at “6am every Monday morning”.

Place a disclaimer on your blog or social media accounts about the scope of your nutrition news and tips, so this cannot be misinterpreted as individual health or medical advice. Be cautious responding to direct requests for nutrition advice while on social media. It is less risky to refer the follower or friend to a third party resource, than give a professional opinion. You may like to share a link to information on the BDA website (such as the public targeted Food Fact Sheets section) or another reputable organisation. And include words like “generally speaking” when answering questions.

Be proactive and protective of others. Flag to any colleagues steps they may like to take, in order to better maintain professional boundaries and privacy.

Double check photos before posting, ensure that there is nothing offensive in the background or anything that may compromise privacy or personal safety.

Ensure you follow your employers’ guidance and policies in relation to social media.
Be honest, informed and transparent

It’s important to be honest and open in your use of social media. It should always be easy for people to determine the capacity in which you are using social media and whether you have a vested interest in the content of your material. If you are actively generating content such as blogging, make sure you understand regulations and “unwritten” rules. Aim to:

> Stick to subject matter that is within your area of expertise or defer to a colleague for advice or comment.

> Be informed, look to the evidence base and make sure you have all the facts before posting or responding.

> Publish accurate information and if you are unsure of the answer to a question, be honest and say so.

> Be careful not to over-simplify your message especially using Twitter where your characters are limited to 140. While it may make sense to you, others may take the message more literally or out of context. You can always start your comment and end with a link to your Facebook or LinkedIn post where you have more space to fill out the detail.

> Be the first to respond to your own mistakes. If you make an error, be up-front and correct it quickly.

> Make it clear if you’re generating content as an individual, company or organisation – the easiest way to do this is to make sure your profile lists who you work for ie Company Dietitian for XX.
If your organisation has a number of authors for their social media sites, consider adding your initials at the end of each post to keep it personal.

Disclose any potential or actual conflicts of interest.

Be transparent about any financial interests including “freebies”, like product samples, you may have been gifted.

Include a list of your sponsors, supporters or in the case of consulting work, your corporate clients on your blog or webpage.

Respect proprietary information and content. Acknowledge the contribution of colleagues and any other sources of original material.

Be responsible for content on your social media sites and respect a difference of opinion and healthy debate. Only delete or edit comments if these may be considered defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous.

Familiarise yourself with copyright, Fair Use and Creative Commons before using photographs and other content you find on the web. Many images cannot be used without paying royalties or obtaining permission.

Make it clear if you’re generating content as an individual, company or organisation – the easiest way to do this is to make sure your profile lists who you work for ie Company Dietitian for XX.
As dietitians, we are aware of the ethical principles and code of conduct within our profession. Therefore, we could think that a lot of information is purely common sense. Common sense is not always common, and if you are working with others, it is important that they are aware of how you would like your practice or work environment to be portrayed online. Aim to:

+ Be aware of any social media or communication policies within your organisation before you start on social media.

+ If there is none, suggest implementing a social media policy within your organisation and take the time to explain the reasons behind the policy, ensuring each staff member signs it.

+ If social media is banned on computers within an organisation, remember it can still be accessed through smart phones.

+ Ask for feedback from your employees about the best way to use social media and technology. If you are employing people from a younger generation, they may have some ideas and/or skills that will benefit your practice or work place.

+ If you are outsourcing or asking administration (non dietetic) staff to provide social media updates of a nutritional nature, make sure these are checked by a dietitian.

+ If you have a large team, it may be worthwhile delegating roles within the realm of social media, so as not to overload one person, and develop everyone’s skills.
Dealing with unplesantries

Whilst social media provides a brilliant tool for promotion and engagement, it also has a dark side. Trolling, abuse or online bullying are an unfortunate feature of these communication platforms and can occur even in the absence of any obvious incitement. If you find yourself on the receiving end of adverse comments you may find this difficult particularly as it may feel like that your professional opinion is being scrutinised. The first and foremost best line of advice is ‘to not take the bait’. Many ‘trolls’ will not maintain their abuse if it is ignored.

# Ignoring or blocking the person involved is often the quickest and easiest way to prevent confrontational dialogue escalating.

# If you have a strong desire to respond, ensure your response is calm and positive but be prepared to walk away if a further negative comment is received.

# You may know the person (outside of cyberspace) who has shared a conflicting opinion or left you a negative comment. In this situation, you may feel that a ‘peer to peer’ or professional discussion would be appropriate and you could offer to arrange this in a non-public but safe forum.

# Remember controversial statements are more likely to receive controversial responses. Consider what you are putting on social media and how your comments may be perceived by a variety of audiences BEFORE you post.

# Never respond to abusive comments with further abusive comments.

# Take screenshots and save any instances of harassment or bullying so that even if it is deleted you have evidence.

Each social media platform has its own mechanism for reporting aggressive or inappropriate content, checkout and follow the procedure of the platform you have used.
Be aware that subjective opinion plays a role in what is considered aggressive or abusive behaviour and what is a robust debate. Therefore it is not possible to tackle all online negativity.

Depending on the circumstance and the nature of messages, it may be appropriate to contact the police. The most common offences that are dealt with by police regarding social media are ‘harassment’ (two or more related occurrences) and ‘malicious communications’ (which may be a single occurrence).

Further information is available online: askthe.police.uk
For further general advice about all aspects of online safety, visit: getsafeonline.org/

Disclaimer:
The BDA cannot support members with every instance of negative interaction online, and members must take responsibility for their own actions on social media. The BDA has a robust social media policy for our own interactions online, which can be accessed via the BDA website. If a member receives negative interaction whilst acting as a BDA media spokesperson, the BDA will provide support. If you would like further advice or support on an issue relating to social media you can contact the BDA office: info@bda.uk.com

The first and foremost best line of advice is ‘to not take the bait’. Many ‘trolls’ will not maintain their abuse if it is ignored.
Employers should have a policy addressing social media usage and should have consulted with staff side trade unions, representatives and employees when drafting it. Check whether your employer has a locally agreed policy on the use of social media.

Employers are entitled to monitor work emails and computer usage, and may choose to block certain sites. Personal mobile devices enable these sites to be accessed during work time, consider how appropriate the use of these sites are whilst you are at work.

Employers can take disciplinary action for misuse of the internet or social media, under the following gross misconduct categories:

- Violation of the dignity at work policy;
- Damage to reputation of the company;
- Breach of confidentiality clauses.

Everything you post on social network sites could be visible to friends, colleagues at work, managers, clients and patients. Once a comment has been posted it may be too late. You could damage your employer’s reputation or disclose confidential information by comments you may make. You cannot always know who will see your profile or updates.

Making threatening, offensive or abusive comments to or about another person, posting embarrassing photos or videos without agreement are forms of cyber bullying. Excluding someone from a friendship group, or pressuring someone to accept a friend request can also be classed as cyber bullying. Think about how you would act face to face.

For more information regarding Social Media at work check out the: BDA Trade Union information sheet.
Jump on now

Now is the right time to make a start in social media, so why not get started!

Aim to:

- Secure your preferred name or handles now, on a range of social media accounts. Most accounts are free to establish and you can leave these dormant until you’re ready.

- Be a passive listener and watcher for a while, to get a feel for the space. Use a free tool, such as Feedly, to monitor online mentions of your chosen key words.

- Start to read and comment on a range of different blogs.

- Define your niche in the “about” or “info” sections, as well as your credentials, in all of your social media accounts.

- Ensure you are able to keep your blog or social media updated regularly. Pick a platform that matches with your time input e.g. Twitter once per day and Facebook 3 times per week.

- Link to other BDA members and “like” and “follow” their blogs and social media accounts. Promote other dietitian’s content and provide consistent messages together, especially when nutrition myths arise.

- Tweet and post about the conferences and events you attend to share with others. Ask conference organisers about a Twitter #hashtag, so you can follow/tweet about the event and it is collated under one #. This conversation can also be captured/archived by Conferize or Tweetchat so that people can see what was discussed, refer back to it, and move the conversation on into different areas.

- Network outside the dietetic profession and promote positive, credible nutrition messages. Be helpful and offer solutions.
# Talk to other dietitians or nutritionists in the know or set up a mini-mentoring arrangement with someone who is social-media savvy.

# Look out for professional development opportunities in social media through BDA media training, advertised in *Dietetics Today* or email: pr@bda.uk.com

# Get your how-to guides and tips by searching online, rather than in a book, which will be out of date by the time it’s published.

# Set yourself some personal boundaries to maintain a healthy balance – social media is easily addictive, give your thumbs a rest during face-to-face social events.

# Be fearless of social media. It’s just a different vehicle to learn to drive, and dietitians are fast learners! As an expert in nutrition, you already have a huge advantage as people want to hear what you’ve got to say.

Network outside the dietetic profession and promote positive, credible nutrition messages. Be helpful and offer solutions.
Social success

Here is a good example of social media being successfully used in the health sector by Dean Royles when he was Chief Executive of the NHS Employers Association.

Dean used Twitter – @NHSE_Dean to amplify messages that he wants people to hear, from encouraging you to get your chief executive to use social media, to directing you to his latest blog post, hosted on his organisation website.

Dean has been on Twitter for a number of years and continues to be a prolific Twitter user and actively engages with his followers by replying to them, retweeting their content and thanking them for following/retweeting/supporting him. He also tackles any problems publicly, and his transparency has earned him over 4,000 followers. Since the first version of this document, Dean has changed jobs and he has adapted his Twitter handle to reflect this.

Use of images - one personal, one professional - so can reach both audiences

Dean’s Twitter Profile page
http://twitter.com/NHSE_Dean
An example of Dean directing people to his blog and number of retweets/favourites

An example of a complaint and how Dean dealt with it quickly and efficiently.
Examples of social success

Below are some examples of how well things can go using social media – they will hopefully inspire you!

Using social media at events

BDA Vision, a leadership event in June 2013, had its impact widened by using Twitter. Those attending on the day were encouraged to tweet about the event using the hashtag #BDAVision, so that those unable to attend could get a flavour of what was happening.

This led to people not attending following #BDAVision and posting their own tweets, often saying they wished they were at the event! Dietitians from the USA and Australia also got in touch to say they had found following all of the event tweets under one # useful as it offered a ‘one-stop-shop’ to learn about the event.

Steps to success:

1. Prior to the event, tweet using your chosen # to get followers used to it.
2. Build your event hashtag into marketing/delegate materials to remind them to tweet and which hashtag to use.
3. Ensure WiFi passwords are well publicised at events on arrival, to encourage participation right from the start of the day.
4. Use main presentation board and verbal reminders throughout the day to encourage attendees to tweet and use the hashtag.
5. Centrally, after the event, do a twitter search around the event and respond to any event/conference tweet that did not use the hashtag with the agreed hashtag, to ensure all tweets are captured.
6. Capture in Conferize or similar so all tweets are archived and accessible in one place like personal/corporate website.
A dietitian posted on the Facebook page for her community centre about an upcoming healthy cooking class. The principal of the local school read the update and added a comment, offering “student volunteers from the senior school”. A member of the local farmer’s market, shared the post to his fellow stall holders and in a matter of days they had pledged support of complementary produce.

A journalist at the local paper picked up on all the comments and contacted the dietitian for an interview, which drove up enrolments. A media studies student approached the dietitian to film the day and create a video demonstrating the recipes, for an assignment. The dietitian then obtained permission from the student and the community centre and uploaded the video to YouTube with links back to the website for the recipe sheets.

After the event she referred interested patients to the recipe video and they then shared it on their own Facebook pages. Colleagues shared the YouTube link on their own Facebook pages too. Within the first six weeks the healthy recipe video received more than 3,000 hits. This helped better position the dietitian as the ‘go to’ person for accurate and practical nutrition information in the local community.

Steps to success:

1. Post about an event on Facebook to generate interest and discussion.
2. This can be amplified by traditional media.
3. Follow up with results in an interesting medium like a video.
4. Consider different ways of sharing the information so people can choose how they view it.
Use social media to help you in research

A nutritionist involved in clinical research was struggling to get subjects to enrol in the university’s research project. She was after a particular subset of new mothers that had gestational diabetes during their first pregnancy. An advertisement in a major paper, and even in a parenting newspaper, had failed to recruit enough suitable subjects.

During her time on Twitter she had been interested in the views of new mums and created a Twitter list of people with popular parenting or “Mummy” blogs. She had formed a great rapport with one of these women, who had a blog called Hungry Bub. The nutritionist had begun to post comments on the blog. She approached this blogger by email and explained about the research project.

The blogger decided to write a post about gestational diabetes and the important new research, and included a call to action for Sydney residents to sign up for the trial. The Hungry Bub blog typically received 35,000 unique visitors per week and had an e-newsletter distribution of 15,000. Within days, the dietitian’s trial quota was filled.

Steps to success:

1. Choose the right social platform for your needs.
2. Use your contacts – if you are active in social media and communicate with people, you will be able to tap in to their audience.
3. Don’t be afraid to try something new.

Start the conversation – you are an expert in your field, and other experts will want to talk with you
Use social media to get evidence-based scientific nutrition research to the masses

A dietitian participated in a public Twitter chat on wholegrains with more than one hundred dietitians in the USA. During the chat she learned about trending, ancient grains like freekeh and wheat berries, plus the latest wholegrain recommendations in the US Dietary Guidelines.

One of the dietitians tweeted about a new fad diet. The book, *This is Finally the Answer Diet*, had been handed to her by a client. Suddenly more dietitians participating in the chat piped in and talked about their knowledge of the new book. The author’s credentials were questionable and the book promoted rapid weight loss and cut out major food groups.

Even though the book had not made its way to UK shores yet, the dietitian wrote a blog post about fad diet failures. She included mention of the new book and approached one of the US dietitians for a quote.

Three months later a UK TV journalist contacted the dietitian for an interview, as the book was launching in London. A Google search by the journalist had revealed her post and the widespread concerns by other dietitians in the comments section. The UK news story questioned the credibility of the book and instead promoted healthy weight management tips provided by the dietitian.

**Steps to success:**

1. Start the conversation – you are an expert in your field, and other experts will want to talk with you.
2. Move the conversation – understand different social media platforms and direct your conversation to the right arena.
3. Get BDA media trained – this will help you when your comments generate print media attention!
Examples - risky business

Below are some examples of how things can go badly using social media – they will hopefully help you avoid making the same mistakes!

Using social media to air your dirty laundry in public

Anybody can have a view on food and nutrition, regardless of whether this is evidence-based or not. Indeed, some people have particular views of the BDA and disagree with our views from a nutrition point or view. There are even some who wrongly believe that we are run by the food industry. On a number of times individuals have tweeted about the BDA to air these views.

On one occasion an individual tweeted about the BDA’s position on sugar. The same individual then went on to make two specific allegations about the BDA being secretive about its corporate members and taking funding from a particular food lobbying group.

The BDA is always relaxed about differing viewpoints about nutrition. After all, isn’t that basic human freedom of speech and thought? However, the two allegations made against the BDA were potentially subject to libel and were simply not true. Rather than fuel the fire by airing this argument in public, a member of the BDA management team, used their personal (but professional) twitter account to address these two allegations.

This resulted in the BDA not being embroiled in a public spat and giving publicity to negative comments. This course of action also allowed key BDA messages to be promoted and killed the negative comments at a very early stage.

Steps to success:

1. Think very carefully before you respond. Be measured and succinct.
2. Some individuals spoil for an online fight to raise their profile. Don’t indulge.
3. Don’t try to change perceptions. Stick to fact.
4. Think about other avenues to respond such as another less high-profile twitter account.
Using social media to complain

A student dietitian on a rural placement was feeling isolated, lonely and overwhelmed. Late at night she had a rant on Twitter about a day full of low lifes with no hope of change.

An orderly at the hospital had become friendly with the student and decided to search for her on Twitter. Even though he wasn’t following her, he could still read her public tweet. His mother had attended an outpatient clinic with the student dietitian that same day. He retweeted her tweet to many of his nursing colleagues and added his “dismay at the attitude of students these days”.

The following day many staff at the small regional hospital had read the tweet and were gossiping about the student’s poor attitude. One of the staff made a formal complaint to the placement supervisor.

What to do differently

1. Choose the right forum for a complaint – a genuine complaint that you need resolving is different from letting off steam.
2. Think before you post – remember anyone can read what you say unless your account is private.
Using photographs and confidentiality

A dietitian was thrilled with the growth in her private practice and the results she was having with her weight management patients. She decided to have an information night for local GPs to attract new clients. She created a PDF flyer invite and sent it out to her private group of medical centre administration staff, created on LinkedIn.

On the flyer she included a successful before and after image of an ex-weight loss client, cropped to remove the person’s head. The ex-client had given prior written consent to use the images in a case study presentation to students.

Unbeknown to the dietitian, the ex-client’s niece worked at a medical centre and easily recognised her aunt by her clothing and body shape. The ex-client made a complaint to the HCPC about breach of privacy and confidentiality. The news made its way around the local health professionals, including the GPs, who lost confidence in the dietitian’s professional integrity. The dietitian was forced to write a public apology to all members of her LinkedIn group and the ex-client.

What to do differently

1. Use stock images either held by your organisation’s press/publishing team or purchase from an online database like istock.
Sharing patient information

A dietitian had just employed a new administration assistant to help her with writing doctors reports and re-booking patients. One day when typing a doctor’s report the assistant was delighted to see that one of her friends was seeing her dietitian employer.

The assistant was aware she was only able to use Facebook in her breaks, so during her lunch she took the opportunity to reach out to her friend, as she hadn’t seen her for a while. She wrote on her friend’s wall “Hey, just saw your name pop up in a letter I was writing at my new job with the dietitian. Let’s plan for a coffee catch up soon.”

The comment meant no harm, but the assistant’s friend didn’t want anyone to know she was seeing a dietitian. She didn’t see the post until the next day, and only found out because she was quizzed by her mother on the details of her appointment.

The assistant’s friend lost some trust in her dietitian because the dietitian should have advised her assistant that confidentiality extends to social media platforms.

What to do differently

1. Make sure your policies extend to social media and anyone who has access to your records is aware of this.
Reducing the problem

If you make a mistake like any of the above examples, try and be transparent and resolve it if at all possible in a suitable manner such as:

- A direct apology
- Deleting an inappropriate message/tweet/post
- Check the ‘what to do differently’ boxes above
- Learn from your mistake
‘Stop and think’ social media checklist

If you are concerned about anything you are about to publish, run through this short checklist.
Does your contribution:

✓ positively promote your role as a dietitian, support worker or student?
✓ reflect positively on your co-workers/colleagues?
✗ conflict with your employer’s mission, culture, values and/or policies?
✗ reveal confidential patient or proprietary business information?
✗ include any information that could directly or indirectly identify a patient under your care

And finally, do you understand how the social media you are using works, including the privacy settings?

“By presenting yourself fully on social media, those who are searching for answers will find you, giving you the opportunity to be involved in all of the communities relating to you and your profession.”

Vivion Cox, Klood Ltd

Resources

User guides for some of the main social media platforms:

- **Twitter** - https://support.twitter.com/articles/215585-twitter-101-getting-started-with-twitter#
- **Facebook** - https://www.facebook.com/help/364458366957655/
- **LinkedIn** - http://help.linkedin.com/app/home
- **Pinterest** - http://about.pinterest.com/basics/
- **YouTube** - http://www.youtube.com/yt/about/getting-started.html

Cochrane (2011) Social Media Workshop
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