



# Federation/FSU Social Media Policy & Procedure

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## **Federation/FSU Social Media**

### **Policy & Procedure**

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## **1. Introduction**

This social media policy provides staff of the GP Federations and Federation Support Units, with clear guidance for the appropriate use of social media.

Federations/FSU encourage staff to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media as part of their work. It is recognised that social media plays an important part in facilitating communication and networking between staff and stakeholders. Social media provides numerous benefits and opportunities including exchanging ideas, promoting success, and attracting staff to Federations/FSU. However, along with these benefits come the risks of managing something that is dynamic and unlimited in scale.

## **2. Purpose**

We recognise that many members of staff use social networking sites and apps both inside and outside of work hours. In most cases this is uncomplicated and trouble-free. This policy aims to highlight and therefore avoid issues arising through the inappropriate use of social media both within and outside the workplace that might compromise the Federation/FSU or the relationships that exist within the Federation/FSU.

This policy applies to both use of social media during working hours both at the normal designated place of work, whilst working at home, at another location where the staff member is undertaking working and outside of work.

Current examples of social media include networking sites and apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Telegram. However, the principles outlined in this policy can also generally be applied to all kinds of online communication, such as personal websites and blogs, all instant messaging apps, discussion boards and general content shared online, including text, photographs, images, video, and audio files.

## **3. Aims**

This policy aims to provide staff with clear guidelines on what is and what is not considered to be appropriate personal, and work use of social media. This policy aims to protect staff and safeguard the reputations of individuals and organisations.

The principles of this policy apply to use of these media regardless of the method used to access it and covers static and mobile IT/computer equipment, as well as work and/or personal smartphones, laptops etc.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

This policy applies to all Federation/FSU staff. However, staff should also familiarise themselves with any Professional Code on social media that may also apply – please see Appendix 1 for further information.

Everyone who works for a Federation/FSU has a personal responsibility to use social media appropriately for work or personal use as inappropriate usage can negatively impact on personal and working relationships and in the most serious cases can end the employment relationship.

#### **4.1 Managers' Responsibilities**

Managers have a responsibility to raise issues relating to social media use with employees in a timely manner, if they become aware of an issue or comment on social media that has the potential to bring the Federation/FSU into disrepute, is deemed to be discriminatory or seen to harass a colleague or patient.

Managers have a responsibility to consider all matters raised under the banner of the policy. If necessary, instances of alleged poor conduct or behaviour in relation to the policy, should be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner to determine the most appropriate course of action.

#### **4.2 Employees' Responsibilities**

- All staff are responsible for reading, ensuring their understanding of and following the guidance set out within this policy.
- Staff have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with any applicable professional code on social media in addition to this policy.
- Staff should report any misuse of social media should be reported to their Lead/Line Manager.

#### **4.3 HR Responsibilities**

Providing accurate advice and support to managers, leads and employees to ensure fairness, effectiveness and consistency of application.

### **5. Use of social media FSU/Federation Purposes**

Only nominated staff are permitted to post material on a recognised Federation/FSU website or Federation/FSU social media account in the name of and on behalf of an FSU/Federation. If a member of staff is unsure if they are nominated, they should check with their Lead/line manager before posting.

Any employee involved in the Federation/FSU's social media activities must remember that they are representing the organisation and use the same precautions as they would with any other work-related communication such as an email or letter on behalf of the employer.

Employees are expected to act carefully and responsibly to protect the Federation's image and reputation. Employees should:

- Ensure their communications are respectful and polite

- Avoid speaking on matters outside their field of expertise and be careful not to answer questions or make statements that fall under somebody else's responsibility
- Follow and observe laws on copyright, trademarks, plagiarism and fair use
- Never post discriminatory, offensive or libellous content and commentary
- Correct or remove any misleading or false content as quickly as possible

Any breach of the above may be dealt with using the Federation/FSU Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

## **6. Standards of social media usage**

### **6.1**

Personal use of social media in the workplace is permitted, subject to certain conditions, as detailed below. It must not be abused or overused, and the Federation/FSU reserves the right to withdraw permission at any time.

The following conditions must be met for personal use to continue:

- use must be minimal and take place substantially outside of normal working hours, for example, breaks, lunchtime.
- use must not interfere with business or service commitments
- use must comply with Federation policies including the Equal Opportunities Policy and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- Staff must not accept service-users/patients as friends/followers

Staff are personally responsible for their communications on social media sites outside the workplace, for example at home, in their own time, using their own equipment. Staff must always be mindful of their contributions and what they disclose about the work of the Federation/FSU.

### **6.2 Expectations for all social media use**

When using social media at work or in their personal time staff must refrain from the activities set out below. Failure to comply with the below expectations may be considered as misconduct and in some cases gross misconduct under the Federation/FSU Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. Employees must refrain from:

- Posting negative comments, photos or videos relating to employees or their employer
- Posting any personal information or material regarding people in their care or whom they encounter through their Federation role on social media.
- Using social media to develop personal relationships with service users/patients and be mindful that all content posted may be viewed by patients and their families/carers

Sharing intellectual property or confidential work-related information e.g., financial information, legal information about Federations, FSU or Practices.

- Posting or forwarding links to any content that may be considered abusive, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory, defamatory or inappropriate.
- Posting or endorsing any material that may bring the Federation/FSU into disrepute

- Conduct or behaviour online which is incompatible with the role, values of the Federations/FSU or professional body
- Bullying and/or harassment, or discrimination of Federation/FSU or Practice staff through offensive or unwanted comments
- Breaches of confidentiality
- Breaching relevant legislation relevant to social media
- Breaching this policy or procedure
- Breaching the trust or confidence of their employer
- Excessive use of personal social media during working hours
- Accessing and using social media inappropriately on ICT equipment provided by the employer or host Practice

Please note inappropriate content or material includes but is not limited to any text, images or other media that would reasonably offend someone based on race, age, sex, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or any other characteristic protected by law.

It also includes any content relating to pornography, racial or religious slurs, gender specific comments, information encouraging criminal skills or terrorism or materials relating to cults, gambling, or illegal drugs

If in doubt as to the appropriateness of a post or any communication using social media staff must consult their lead/line manager before posting.

## 7. Guidance for staff who use social media in a personal capacity

Staff are advised when identifying **a Federation/FSU as their employer in personal social media accounts or profiles to use** a disclaimer such as “opinions are my own” to avoid misunderstandings. Staff should not state or imply that their personal opinions and content are authorised or endorsed by the Federation/FSU when using social media in a personal capacity.

If a member of staff has disclosed their affiliation as an employee of the Federation/FSU, they must ensure that their profile and any content they post are consistent with the professional image they present to service-users, patients and colleagues.

Staff may tag or add the FSU/Federations social media pages to a personal post to raise awareness and promote Federation/FSU work. However, if a member of staff is in any doubt as to the appropriateness of this, they should speak to their Lead/line manager before doing so.

## 8. Professional Codes of Conduct

Employees of Federations/FSU should be aware of specific guidance provided by professional groups on the appropriate use of social media. Employees are reminded that professional codes of conduct must be adhered to in respect of social media. Where applicable, this guidance will be referenced in cases of misconduct relating to social media use.

Examples include but are not limited to guidance provided by the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the General Medical Council and the Pharmaceutical Society NI. Please see Appendix 1 for further details.

As appropriate, and where such misuse or misconduct gives rise to the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, the Federation may be obliged to make a referral or notify the appropriate professional body. Employees should be advised of referrals, where practicable, in advance of any such referral being made.

Decisions in relation to ongoing professional registration as a result of such issues will be for the relevant statutory regulatory body to determine.

## **9. Non-compliance or Breach of Social Media Procedure**

Staff should be aware that if a breach of this policy is identified, action may be taken under the Federation/FSU Disciplinary Policy & Procedure.

The Federation/FSU reserves the right to restrict or prevent access to certain internet sites at work including social media websites if personal use is identified and considered to be excessive.

Monitoring where a breach is suspected would only be carried out to the extent permitted or as required by law and as necessary and justifiable for business purposes.

Misuse of social media and other websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Federation/FSU.

## **10. Reporting of inappropriate use of social media**

If an employee has concerns regarding any content, they have noticed on social media they must inform their line manager and/or their local FSU HR.

## **11. Data Protection/GDPR**

In applying this policy, the Organisation will have due regard for the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Personal Confidential Data of data subjects will be processed fairly and lawfully and in accordance with the six data protection principles. Data Subject's Rights and freedoms will be respected, and measures will be in place to enable employees (data subjects) to exercise those rights. Appropriate technical and organisational measures will be designed and implemented to ensure an appropriate level of security is applied to the processing of personal confidential data.

## **12. Equality Statement**

In applying this policy, the GP Federation/FSU will have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.



## Appendix 1 Professional Codes on social media

Employees can find additional information and guidance within:

- **British Medical Association (BMA)**  
*Ethics of Social Media*
  - <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/personal-ethics/ethics-of-social-media-use>
- **General Medical Council (GMC)**  
*Doctors' Use of Social Media*  
  
<https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/doctors-use-of-social-media>
- **NISCC**  
*The Standards of Conduct and Practice*
  - <https://niscc.info/standards-and-guidance/>
- **Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC)**  
*Social Media Guidance*
  - [Social media guidance - The Nursing and Midwifery Council \(nmc.org.uk\)](https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards-and-guidance/social-media-guidance)
- **Pharmaceutical Society for NI (PSNI)**  
*The Code Professional Standards of Conduct, Ethics and Performance for Pharmacists in Northern Ireland*
  - <https://www.psni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/22504-PSNI-Code-of-Practice-Book-final.pdf>
- **Pharmacy Forum NI (PFNI)**  
*Social Media Professional Guidance*
  - <https://www.pfni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SOCIAL-MEDIA-Guidance-for-PFNI-website-March-2018-2.pdf>
- **Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT)**  
  
<https://www.rcot.co.uk/promoting-occupational-therapy/using-social-media>