Staying out of trouble on social media

Healthcare organisations need to communicate and engage like never before, and social media have a huge role to play. So don't be put off by the pitfalls – follow these tips from **Craig Ryan** and you won't go far wrong.

❶ PERSONAL DOESN'T MEAN PRIVATE

It's not essential to have separate "work" and "personal" social media accounts, but if you use personal accounts to talk about work, put a disclaimer in your profile. Your employer could still take action against you if you say something that causes the organisation "reputational damage", breaches staff or patient confidentiality, or is racist, sexist or otherwise so generally offensive that it brings into question whether you should be in the job at all. Use common sense and, if in doubt, don't post it.

❷ A BIT OF POLITICS IS FINE

It's okay to get political on your personal account (subject to the points above) but take care when using a work computer. Make sure you read your employer's social media policy, and avoid using specific examples from your workplace to make political points, especially if the information is confidential or isn't being made public otherwise.

❸ SOCIAL MEDIA ISN'T PART OF THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Social media isn't the place to air workplace grievances. General gripes about work and the NHS are fine, but be careful what you say about your employer and never use social media to attack other staff, however justified you feel your complaint is. If you don't want to talk to your manager, go to see your MiP rep.

❹ THINK BEFORE YOU POST

Pause for a moment before you click send. If you have any doubts about what you've said, leave it for half an hour. The world can probably wait that long. And

never post when you are angry about something at work. Wait until you've calmed down a bit.

❺ READ YOUR OWN POST

Social media is fast and it's easy to slip up, especially with autocorrect functions. Remember how Wrexham council's Executive Board became its "Pathetic Board"? And we all know what can happen to the word "public". Read through your post at least once before sending – aloud if you can.

❻ CLICK AND CHECK

Make sure the links in your posts work and lead to where you think they do, especially when sharing links from other people. This isn't just a courtesy to your readers – spammers and porn merchants often attach dodgy links to otherwise innocuous posts. One quick click can save a lot of embarrassment later on.

❼ OWN UP TO MISTAKES

If you or your organisation make a mistake on social media (and you will), own up and apologise. Don't try to blame other staff and never claim your account has been "hacked" unless it really has. No one will believe you.

❽ TAKE AN INTEREST

Too often social media is left to junior staff on the spurious grounds that only young people understand it. This can quickly lead to a disconnect between the people doing the social media and the organisation's wider objectives and functions. The best way to get involved as a manager is to use social media yourself.

❾ LEARN FROM THE BEST

Look at what other people are doing to see how you can keep your social media work interesting without slipping up too often. Among the most effective social media users in the NHS community are: @ManchesterCCGs, @DrUmeshPrabhu, @LDN-Ambulance, @helenbevan, @stuartberry1, @nurse_w_glasses, @LisaSaysThis and, of course, @Jon_Restell.

❿ DON'T BE PUT OFF

There are pitfalls in all forms of communication and social media is no different. Just ask yourself: "Would I say this to colleagues at a conference?" Social media is becoming mission critical in the NHS, so you might as well like it as lump it. Get stuck in!

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