



**SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

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<b>Documents to read alongside these Guidelines</b>	Dignity at Work Policy Disciplinary Policy Use of Mobile Phones Policy IT Security Policy, Appendix 5 – Email and Internet Policy
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**OUT OF DATE POLICY DOCUMENTS MUST NOT BE RELIED ON**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The provision of safe effective health care, whilst ensuring that individuals are treated with dignity and that their right to privacy is respected, is central to the development and delivery of quality services within Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (the UHB). While it is accepted that social media and mobile telecommunications technologies are core components of modern social behaviour and communication, inappropriate use poses a risk to the organisation and its patients and staff.

## **2 SCOPE**

These guidelines apply to all employees of the UHB. For the purposes of these guidelines individuals who are engaged by the Nurse Bank or as Locums are treated as employees.

The principles set out in these guidelines will also apply to other individuals and groups, including agency workers, contractors, honorary contract holders, volunteers and trainees.

## **3 AIM**

The UHB acknowledges that many employees use social media for personal and professional purposes. Generally, this is uncomplicated and trouble-free, but increasingly social media has blurred the lines between, and can have repercussions in, people's personal and professional lives.

The purpose of this guidance is to set out the expectation that all staff behave appropriately and in a way which is consistent with the UHB values and professional codes of conduct when using social media, and especially:

- if a member of staff identifies an association with the UHB
- discusses their work, colleagues or patients
- comes into contact, or is likely to, with service users on social media sites.

## **4 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

For the purposes of these guidelines, social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs and video- and image-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

## **5 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

- 5.1 Social media or content created and exchanged within virtual communities, through the use of online tools, has the potential to help NHS staff communicate with staff, patients and service users. Social media can accelerate knowledge acquisition and dissemination and can be used to assist patients and clients to make health choices and manage their chronic conditions.

In addition, social media enables individuals to connect with like-minded people, increase the size of their professional network and keep up to date with best practice in their chosen field of study or care.

- 5.2 The UHB recognises the benefits of using social media for increased networking and sharing knowledge, and does not want to discourage individuals from using these sites. However it is important that individuals realise that things posted online can have an impact on their career and employment.

Some of the disadvantages of social media include:

1. it can be challenging to keep professional and personal lives separate.
2. social media is open to all – anyone can look at your Twitter profile or search for your name online
3. it is easy for organisations and the media to search through your social media posts.
4. it can be very hard to permanently delete social media posts and screen shots are very easy to take.
5. posts on social media sites often lack context – it is sometimes hard to get humour or tone of voice across on the sites.

## **6 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK**

- 6.1 Employees are not allowed to access social media websites from the organisation's computers or devices at any time. This includes laptop/handheld computers or devices distributed by the organisation for work purposes.

- 6.2 The UHB understands that employees may wish to use their own computers or devices e.g. smart phones, to access social media websites while they are at work. Employees must limit their use of social media on their own equipment to ensure that it does not require a substantial expenditure of time and that there is no interference with job performance. This should be restricted to official breaks, lunch times etc except when being used for CPD (continuing professional development).

The duty to act in an appropriate manner does not only apply when an employee is at work, but at all times especially when a connection to the UHB or NHS has been made. This duty equally applies when an individual device/smart phone is used and whether you are in work or in your own time.

## **7 SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE**

The ease of use, functionality and immediacy of social media and mobile phone technologies can lead, either by accident or design, to information that can be attributed to the UHB (including other members of staff) and/or patients being recorded or revealed inappropriately.

It is important that staff understand the need to act in line with the UHB values and professional standards both in and outside work. This includes the use social media in a personal capacity. By working for the NHS in Wales and the UHB, employees sign up for its values and expected behaviours. The public does not expect to see NHS staff tweeting or updating Facebook or other sites with things that do not match their professional image.

## **8 PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR STAFF USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

- 8.1 Any communications that employees make in a personal or professional capacity through social media must not:

1. breach confidentiality
  - do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about patients or complaints about colleagues. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. Be mindful that the ethical and legal duty to protect patient confidentiality applies equally online as in other media
2. bring the organisation into disrepute
  - if you identify yourself as an employee of the UHB, you should act responsibly at all times and uphold the reputation of the organisation and your profession. Even if you do not identify yourself as an employee or health care professional, remember that your conduct online could jeopardise your

employment or registration if it calls your fitness to practice into question

- do not post defamatory, derogatory or offensive comments on the internet about service users, colleagues, their work or the UHB.
3. do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual by:
    - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, , religion or belief, sexual orientation or age
    - using social media to bully another individual or behave in a way which is contrary to the Dignity at Work Policy
    - posting images or links that are discriminatory or offensive
  4. distribute sexually explicit material
  5. use social networking sites in any way which is unlawful (including breach of copyright law)
- 8.2 To help avoid mistakes and to stay professional when using social media the following practical advice should be adhered to.
1. Do not tweet or access social networks in patient/clinical areas.
  2. Never post pictures of patients or service users, even if they ask you to do this. If your mobile phone has a camera, you should not use it in the workplace.
  3. Keep your personal and professional life as separate as possible. This includes not using NHS Wales email addresses when registering for social media accounts.
  4. Protect your own privacy by adjusting the privacy settings - the more your personal life is exposed through social networking sites, the more likely it is that this could have a negative impact. Remember that images posted online by friends or family may be accessible to others if they have not restricted access to their information.
  5. Do not use social media to build or pursue relationships with service users, even if they are no longer in your care.
  6. Do not use social media for raising and escalating concerns ie whistleblowing. Alternative channels are in place in the UHB for this (e.g. Grievance Procedure, Incident Reporting, Safeguarding Policies, Whistleblowing Policy, and the Safety Valve)
  7. Remember that complaints about the use of social networking sites or other online activity will be taken as seriously as real-world

events. This includes cyber-bullying and sharing confidential information online.

8. If managers or staff are aware of situations when social media has been used inappropriately and are unsure about how to proceed, advice can be sought from the HR Administration and Advisory Team.

## **9 DISCIPLINARY ACTION OVER SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

All employees are required to adhere to the principles set out in these guidelines. Employees should note that inappropriate action online, including breaches of the principles set out in these guidelines, may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues, naming patients/work areas, illegal activity or social media activity causing serious damage to the organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to dismissal and or/police involvement.

Advice should be sought from Human Resources before any decisions on disciplinary action are taken. All actions must be taken in line with the relevant Disciplinary Policy.

## **10 RESOURCES**

There are no additional resources required for the implementation of these guidelines

## **11 TRAINING**

There is no formal training available in connection with these guidelines. However, staff will be made aware of the principles set out in these guidelines at the time of induction, and existing staff will be advised of them when the guidelines are launched. Any specific queries should be directed to the HR Advisory and Administration team.

## **12 EQUALITY**

Cardiff and Vale UHB is committed to ensuring that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the way we provide services to the public and the way we treat our staff, patients and others reflects their individual needs and does not discriminate, harass or victimise individuals or groups. These principles run throughout our work and are reflected in our core values, our staff employment policies, our service standards and our Strategic Equality Plan & Equality Objectives. The responsibility for implementing the scheme falls to all employees and UHB Board members, volunteers, agents or contractors delivering services or undertaking work on behalf of the UHB.



An Equality Impact Assessment on these guidelines and the way they operate has been undertaken and received feedback. This was to determine any possible or actual impact that these guidelines may have on any groups in respect of gender, maternity and pregnancy, carer status, marriage or civil partnership issues, race, disability, sexual orientation, Welsh language, religion or belief, transgender, age or other protected characteristics. The assessment found that it was possible that the guidelines could be perceived as having an adverse impact on certain groups of staff, especially if they rely on social media as a key method of communicating. However, this should be viewed in the context of the negative impact that inappropriate use of social media can have on the UHB, the individual (both personally and professionally), and on colleagues, patients and others who come into contact with the organisation. Where appropriate plans will be made for the necessary actions required to minimise any stated impact to ensure that we meet our responsibilities under the equalities and human rights legislation.

### **13 AUDIT**

This policy may be subject to audit, and will be assessed in line with normal audit planning processes.

### **14 REFERENCES/FURTHER INFORMATION**

Additional, useful information and advice can be found by accessing the following links:

[Using Social Media: practical and ethical guidance for doctors and medical students](#), BMA

[Social Networking Sites and the NMC Code of Conduct](#), NMC

Using Social Media and Mobile Technologies and Maintaining the Dignity and Privacy of Individuals – Awareness note for staff working in the NHS in Wales, NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS)

[Responsible Social Networking](#), UNISON

[Social networking and online forums – when does the DPA apply?](#), Information Commissioner's Office

### **15 DISTRIBUTION**

These guidelines will be available via the UHB Clinical Portal, Intranet and Internet web sites. Where members of staff do not have access to these resources, the line manager must ensure that they are aware of the content where appropriate.

Responsibility for distribution within Clinical Boards will be undertaken by the Head of Operations and Delivery.

## **16 REVIEW**

These guidelines will be reviewed to reflect any changes in guidance or legislation. As a minimum, they will be reviewed three years after the date of approval.