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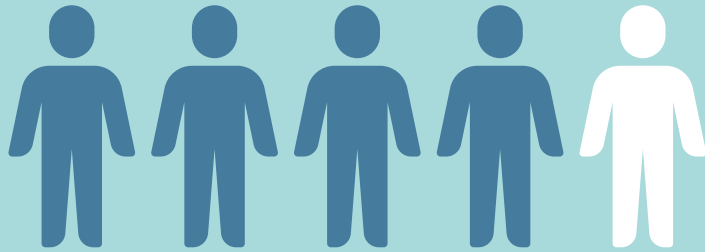
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# Can I post this?

a quick guide to social media  
for medical students



# Why is this guide needed?



- social media is part of modern life
- roughly 84% of the UK population used it in 2020
- it's important to recognise that this statistic includes many medical students, and you have the right to share your opinions and views

Social media can be a very useful tool professionally and personally. Some of its many uses include:

- sharing ideas and information
- campaigning
- offering and receiving professional and peer support
- connecting with colleagues, friends and family

**However, many medical students seem unaware of the possible legal and ethical issues that could arise from being online.**

This guide will show you how to navigate social media professionally and safely as a medical student.





# Achieving good medical practice

- Achieving good medical practice by the GMC and MSC outlines the principles, values, and standards expected of you, both inside and outside medical school, including your social media presence.
- Misuse of social media shows a failure to demonstrate good medical practice as a medical student and could lead to fitness to practice investigations or even termination of a course.
- This is not to restrict you from expressing your opinions and views, but just caution taken to avoid undermining the public's trust in the profession.




**Swipe to see the GMC's principles in practice!**


# Can I accept a friend request from a patient I have seen on placement?

It is paramount to keep a professional distance online, just as you would in real life.

- Accepting a friend request from a patient online could mean they have access to your personal information. It could also impact their view of the profession.
- Furthermore, it may encourage a patient to contact you about their care or that of a relative, which could affect the professional relationship with you and their doctor and further complicate the situation.



While you may not want to offend a patient by declining their friend request, it would be prudent to be careful when considering this circumstance and politely decline.



It's best to keep personal and professional life separate. For example, having a Facebook account just for family and friends while creating a professional Twitter account for sharing information that would be suitable for patients to see.

*(professionalism, privacy)*

# Can I post about an interesting case from my work experience?



You have the same legal and ethical duties of patient confidentiality on social media as you do face-to-face.

1. Even if details or photographs of a clinical case are anonymised, they still need patient consent, otherwise patient confidentiality can be broken.

2. It could also be possible for someone to piece together details that identify a patient through separate posts, making information about their care public, thus breaking patient confidentiality and trust.

3. Furthermore, information about your location or a patient may be embedded in a photo or a post, which could endanger everyone involved.

4. It is best to avoid the discussion of patients on social media. If you must post professionally, it is essential to retain patient consent and inform them how their information will be used, minimise the information shared, and try to anonymise it as much as possible.



*(maintaining confidentiality, patient safety)*

# Can I discuss patient cases I have seen on private messaging apps?

It is critical to maintain patient confidentiality, both in person and online.

Whilst using private messaging apps to discuss cases is convenient, the data security of apps differs.

It is important to remember that even if an account is private, information can still easily be shared. This information can also be requested, e.g. for investigations by police, coroners, etc.

A good rule of thumb is only to share something you are happy to be publicised in a newspaper, and think of what the patient would feel if they saw what you are sharing.

Make sure to review the privacy settings for each app often, keep conversations professional, and don't share any patient identifiable information (e.g. names, NHS number, address).

*(maintaining confidentiality, patient safety, privacy)*








**Can I  
comment on a  
post I dislike  
and have a  
discussion  
with the  
author?**



It isn't only posting that matters. Interactions with others online must be to the same standard as face-to-face, where medical students should not bully, harass or make inappropriate comments.

It is important to remember that even anonymous posts can be traced to the original author, so be wary of what you post and who can see it.

Furthermore, you should be aware that posts online are subject to the same laws of copyright and defamation as written or verbal communications.



You have the right to an opinion and be able to share it, but professionalism also needs to be upheld. It is best to avoid engaging in an argument, ignore the post and block the user. If information needs correcting, quote facts from sources and be respectful.

*(professionalism, defamation)*

# Can I give out medical advice and share educational content?

It is crucial to work within your remit and know your limitations.

- Medical students are only allowed to give medical advice under the supervision of other registered healthcare practitioners, so this would not be permitted face-to-face or online.
- Regarding sharing information, you should avoid sharing anything outside your scope of practice as a medical student.

If you identify as a medical student online, you have the responsibility to uphold this reputation and behave professionally. Any material shared by people identifying themselves as health care professionals is likely to be taken on trust, so be mindful not to mislead the general public.

You have the right to use social media and share, but be careful when doing this. It is best to check the source's credibility, share only things within your capabilities, and maintain a professional demeanour.

*(working within your remit, anonymity)*



# Can I post about my day at medical school or placement?

Medical students have the right to freedom of speech. However, it is essential to be respectful and careful to maintain the confidentiality of everyone around you.

- Most breaches of confidentiality are accidental, so it is paramount to be mindful of what you share.
- Be wary of activities that can appear like harmless fun online, as they may backfire in person.
- Avoid posting anything that may cause concern from colleagues, teachers, healthcare providers, or educational institutions.

Ask yourself these questions...

- Could I say this out loud to my peers or patients?
- Am I about to make a prejudiced comment about someone's race, sexuality, gender, or religion?
- Could this comment damage the reputation of the medical profession?

It is best to try and post mainly about yourself. Be mindful of what you post about fellow medical students and the medical school itself. Remember to ask for permission, and think about how your post could be perceived by the public.

*(respect for colleagues, maintaining confidentiality)*

If you are uncertain about how to do something on social media...

- consult your medical school
- check the guidelines provided by the GMC
- get in touch with someone who can help, including BMA, MPS, MDU, MSC

