

Association of Clinical Pathologists

Guidance for using Social Media

See:

General Medical Council:

Doctors' use of social media, March 2013

http://www.gmc-uk.org/Doctors_use_of_social_media.pdf_51448306.pdf

Medical Defence Union:

Guide to social media

<https://www.themdu.com/guidance-and-advice/guides/guide-to-social-media>

British Medical Association:

Using social media: practical and ethical guidance for doctors and medical students

<https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/college-publications/docs/using-social-media/>

The Royal College of Pathologists' Code of Conduct includes a statement that those working on behalf of the College should:

"be mindful that even when a distinction is made between personal views and the views of the College, this may still become blurred by the recipient and that care should be taken, for example, when commenting on social media platforms".

Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance is for officers and members of the Association of Clinical Pathologists (ACP) and is intended particularly to set expectations for appropriate use of the social media platforms established by the ACP. It also encompasses all use of social media by anyone who might be regarded, through an official role or other affiliation (including membership of the ACP), as representing the ACP or its views. It is based predominantly on the GMC guidance, informed by other sources including those referenced above.

Social Media

These are web-based platforms allowing creation and wide exchange of content; as at the start of 2017, they include blogs, internet forums (e.g., doctors.net), content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flickr) and social networking sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, WhatsApp).

The social media platforms established by the ACP do not include any forums for question-and-answer or other forms of interactive dialogue; obviously, content may be shared, liked, re-tweeted and quoted in postings arising from other users' accounts. The ACP platforms are intended for use by the ACP as an organisation, to publicise appropriate learning and funding opportunities for the benefit of pathology professionals. The ACP may also use these platforms to conduct occasional surveys among their social media followers. Material may only be posted onto the ACP platforms by, or with the explicit permission of, designated nominees of the ACP Council.

Why Use Social Media?

Social media enable 'near real-time' discussion of health policy, strategy and topical healthcare news among diverse professionals and interested members of the public. They facilitate promotion of educational activities and other web-based educational resources. They underpin the establishment of professional networks for information sharing and learning. All of these activities have been transformed by the speed and reach of social media in recent years, and the expansion of such media is increasing.

Expected Standards

In line with the GMC's 'Good Medical Practice', we expect ACP members using social media to maintain patient confidentiality, patient and public trust in the medical profession, and respect for colleagues. You must ensure that information you post is factual, evidence-based and not defamatory. You should be transparent about any conflict of interest, including declaration of any financial or commercial interests. You must also comply with your employers' organisational policies for social media use. A particular point of note in the GMC guidance is that anything you post on line, if you are known to be a doctor, may reasonably be taken on trust and regarded as representing the wider medical profession. All posts linked to your identity as a doctor should also be identified with your true name.

The Extra Dimensions of Social Media

Use of social media creates uncertain boundaries between private and public life. Privacy on line is limited and individuals should be aware of the privacy settings of each of their social media profiles, reviewing these regularly to ensure they are appropriate. Anyone with whom you share details on line may be able to access your personal details and also, from GPS settings, information about your location. Information about location may be embedded within images posted on line and therefore accessible to others. While individual data items (e.g., single photographs) on line may not breach confidentiality, summated items (e.g., multiple photographs from a particular event) may do so when considered collectively. Deletion of on-line content, once published, may be difficult as others may have distributed it or added comment to it. These features make posting on-line content via social media potentially more sensitive than traditional forms of publishing and broadcasting.

Use and Misuse of the ACP Social Media Platforms

When using social media it is particularly important to consider how to maintain separation between personal and professional opinions/viewpoints expressed on line. The social media platforms established by the ACP are intended solely for the sharing of professional information. In addition, they should not be used to engage in any dialogue with patients about their care. Members using these platforms to share or quote ACP postings must not risk bringing the ACP, the wider medical profession or allied professions into disrepute. ACP social media content will be monitored and misuse of any of the ACP platforms, breaching the expected GMC standards outlined above, will be reported to the ACP Council. This may lead to disciplinary action that, at Council's discretion, may include cancellation of membership.

Dr Bridget S Wilkins 23.01.17

On behalf of ACP Council