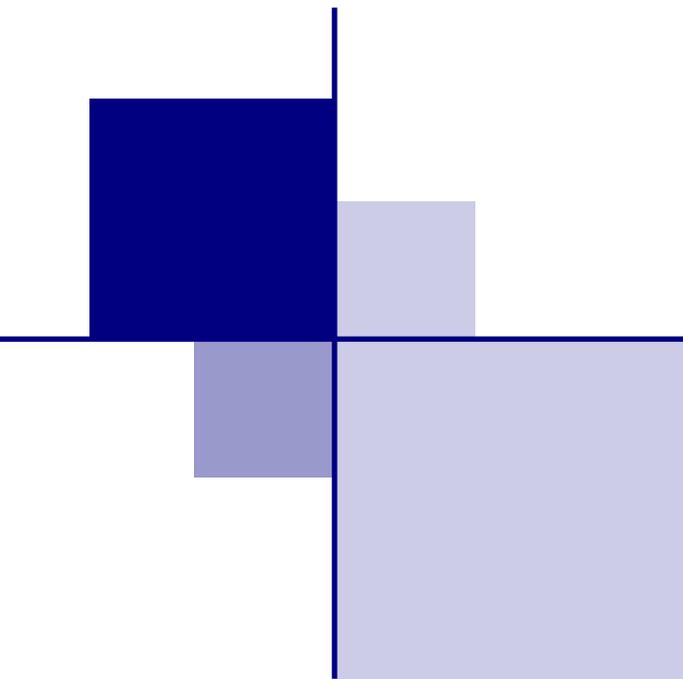




The Royal College of
Chiropractors

Advice Note

Chiropractors' Use of Social Media



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Social media includes, but is not restricted to, a variety of websites and associated apps that allow users to create and share information and converse across a wide network. Examples include Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter. Social media sites provide a powerful tool for raising public awareness about health issues. They enable healthcare organisations and health professionals to readily disseminate information to patients and the public and to participate in conversations about healthcare needs.

It is particularly important to note that the expectations of chiropractors as professionals do not change because they are communicating through social media rather than through some other means, and to understand the benefits of social media while remaining aware of the risks. This advice note aims to raise awareness of the potential pitfalls and thus help chiropractors engage with social media in a professional manner that is compatible with the General Chiropractic Council's Code of Practice and Standard of Proficiency.

Relevant statutory requirements

The following excerpts from the GCC Code of Practice and Standard of Proficiency should always be borne in mind in relation to social media:

A5. Confidentiality

You must keep information about patients confidential

C1. Acting with Honesty and Integrity

You must act with honesty and integrity and never abuse your professional standing by rousing people's fears or imposing your views on them

C4. Publicising your work or practice

You or anyone acting on your behalf must use only factual and verifiable information when publicising your work or practice.

The information must not;

- a. mislead
- b. be inaccurate
- c. abuse the trust of members of the public
- d. exploit their lack of experience or knowledge about either health or chiropractic matters
- e. instil fear of future ill-health
- f. put pressure on people to use chiropractic
- g. bring the profession into disrepute

C5. Use of titles and qualifications

You must not use any title or qualification in a way that may mislead the public as to its meaning or significance, or to claim you are better than other chiropractors.

E3. Professional behaviour

You must avoid acting in a way that may undermine public confidence in the chiropractic profession or bring the profession into disrepute.

F1. Respecting the skills and contributions of others

You must respect the skills and contributions that others bring to the care of patients. You must not discriminate against or unjustly criticise another health professional.

Privacy and image

Use of social media has blurred the boundaries between public life and private life, largely because online information can be easily accessed by so many people. Chiropractors need to be aware of the limitations of privacy online and should regularly review the privacy settings for each of their social media profiles for the following reasons:

- a. Social media sites cannot guarantee confidentiality, whatever privacy settings are in place;
- b. Patients, employers and potential employers, or any other organisation with which you have a relationship, may be able to access your personal information;
- c. Information about your location may be embedded within photographs and other content and available for others to see;
- d. Once information is published online it can be difficult to remove it; other users may distribute it further or comment on it.

It is a good idea to regularly 'audit' personal profile pages and the information that is retrieved by search engines and compare this with the professional image you wish to portray to others.

KEY POINT

You should always act as though any information and images you post online will remain there forever and could be distributed, shared, commented upon and accessed by anyone, including your patients, family, colleagues and employers.

Maintaining boundaries

It is important for chiropractors to keep their personal and professional online profiles separate at all times. It is not appropriate to accept any invitation from a patient to become a contact/friend on a personal profile. To maintain and preserve professional boundaries, patients should only have access to 'clinic'/professional social media profiles.

It is advisable to be constantly alert to situations where the boundaries between personal and professional can become blurred, and to apply your professional judgement.

Maintaining confidentiality

Chiropractors must not discuss real patients, their illnesses, conditions or any of their personal information in public. Thus, when a colleague is also a friend on social media, it is not appropriate to discuss patient cases or share images of patients' x-rays.

Accuracy and respect

It is advisable to check that anything you post about other people or organisations is factually accurate, just as you would in any other setting; there have been cases of professionals being sanctioned for publicising erroneous information in this way.

Comments that could be perceived as racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise prejudiced must not be made, even if intended in jest or as satire; such comments can be misconstrued or misreported.

Colleagues and other health professions/professionals must be treated fairly and with respect. You must not bully, harass or make gratuitous, unsubstantiated or unsustainable comments about individuals online.

When interacting with or commenting about individuals or organisations online, it is necessary to be aware that postings online are subject to the same laws of copyright and defamation as written or verbal communications, whether they are made in a personal or professional capacity.

It is important to think carefully before swearing or being overly critical of people online; imagine you are speaking to them face-to-face and always remain polite and considerate, even if they have been rude to others or you.

KEY POINT

Remain aware of when to hit the 'logout' button - don't get drawn into 'slanging matches'

Conflicts of interest

When you post material online you should be open about any conflict of interest and declare any financial or commercial interests in healthcare organisations or any other form of organisation.

You should be aware that content uploaded anonymously can, in many cases, be traced back to its point of origin.

KEY POINT

Learn how to promptly delete posts and other information you have uploaded in error as this may reduce their distribution – but understand that even deleted material may be recovered or remain publicly available in some circumstances.

Conclusion

Whether you are working as a sole practitioner, in a principal's practice, or in a multidisciplinary practice, it is advisable that you operate a social media policy within the organisation/workplace. If you do not have a social media policy it is advisable to create one and ensure it is widely disseminated, implemented and regularly reviewed. Should you witness a colleague behaving inappropriately online it is your responsibility to bring this to their attention and/or report it to any appropriate body.

If in any doubt about aspects of staying safe and protecting others in relation to online social media, consider arranging/attending specific social media training.

Useful Resources

General Chiropractic Council – Code of Practice and Standard of Proficiency

'This Is Me'. Workbook designed to help you explore the ideas and issues surrounding the concept of Digital Identity.

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