Navigating Social Media for Healthcare Students

Hi, and welcome to our presentation on "Navigating Social Media for Healthcare Student. As students in HCPC-regulated courses, it's crucial to ensure that our online activities align with professional expectations, allowing us to benefit from social media while avoiding any breaches of standards. The HCPC sets codes of practice for us all to follow, protecting the public.

Learning Outcomes:
- Understand the benefits and risks of social media for healthcare professionals.
- Develop knowledge of HCPC regulations.
- Gain actionable tips for managing your online presence.

The HCPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance, and Ethics form the foundation of our professional practice. (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), 2016; HCPC, 2023). These guidelines dictate how we interact with patients, colleagues, and the community, ensuring we operate ethically. Regularly reviewing these standards on the HCPC website keeps us aligned with the evolving landscape of healthcare ethics and regulations.

Social media is a powerful tool that has transformed communication within healthcare (HCPC, 2017). Platforms like LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) facilitate education, collaboration, and professional visibility. You'll find you're just a click away from engaging with senior healthcare professionals and observing their activities. A study even suggests approximately 64% of clinicians use social media for professional purposes (Guerra et al., 2022).

Social media's role extends beyond personal use to professional development and patient engagement. It offers continuous learning opportunities, public health advocacy, and professional networking. However, using social media effectively requires balancing it with HCPC standards, preserving the profession's integrity and trust (HCPC, 2016).

Quickly think: what are some of the risks of social media are?

While social media offers many benefits, it also poses challenges such as maintaining confidentiality, managing professional boundaries, and balancing personal beliefs. A single misstep can damage patient trust and professional credibility, highlighting the need for careful use of social media.

Our online presence reflects our professional identity and must adhere to the same HCPC standards that guide our offline behaviour (HCPC, 2017). This continuity emphasises the importance of integrity and professionalism in all mediums. Our digital footprint is permanent, making foresight and discretion essential in online activities.

We must actively challenge discrimination and bias, ensuring equitable treatment and access for all, including our digital interactions. Upholding values of respect, inclusivity, and non-discrimination online reflects the core of HCPC standards, fostering an inclusive healthcare environment (HCPC, 2023).

Maintaining clear professional boundaries online is crucial (HCPC, 2017). Strategies like separate professional and personal accounts help protect these boundaries, ensuring our online conduct remains appropriate and respectful (HCPC, 2017). Maintaining appropriate boundaries on social media, as in any other form of communication, is essential. Always communicate with service users professionally (HCPC, 2017). Discuss it with your employer if you contact service users directly using this account (HCPC, 2017). Be cautious if service users try to contact you through your account (HCPC, 2017). Refusing friend requests and clarifying that mixing social and professional relationships is inappropriate (HCPC, 2017). If follow-up is needed, use a more "secure communication channel, such as your professional email" (HCPC, 2017).

Effective communication is a cornerstone of healthcare, requiring the same professionalism online as in person (HCPC, 2017). Our commitment to accuracy, evidence-based information, and confidentiality must remain strong when engaging on social media (HCPC, 2017). These principles guide our interactions, reinforcing the trust and confidence of patients and the public place in us (HCPC, 2016).

It is essential to maintain patient confidentiality to build patient trust. When interacting digitally, we handle patient information carefully and always obtain consent before sharing identifiable data. Violating this trust can result in legal consequences and damage the relationship between the healthcare provider and the patient, highlighting the importance of being cautious online (HCPC, 2016; HCPC, 2017; Data Protection Act (2018) (DPA)).

As healthcare professionals, it is crucial to display honesty and integrity in our online activities (HCPC, 2016). Ensuring our communications are truthful, transparent, and absent of misleading information is essential and in line with HCPC professional standards (HCPC, 2016). Adhering to this ethical behaviour is vital for upholding public trust and bolstering the credibility of the healthcare profession. Remember, the DPA (2018) also applies, with implemented GDPR regulations, so ensure posts are not breached.

Healthcare professionals must demonstrate honesty and integrity online (HCPC, 2016). It is essential to communicate truthfully and transparently and avoid misleading information following HCPC professional standards (HCPC, 2016). Upholding ethical conduct helps to maintain public trust and reinforces the credibility of healthcare. It also means that you are providing disclaimers if you are working on any paid promotion, and you should consider whether paid promotion or advertising is appropriate - do your research! Also, it is essential to gain permission before sharing work with intellectual property (such as copyright) and providing proper references to sources (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988)).

Understand who can see your posts and know each social media channel's privacy settings. Assume anything you post online is visible to everyone (HCPC, 2017). If

using social media for professional purposes, ensure the information is fair and accurate, including a disclaimer that views are yours and not your employer's own (HCPC, 2017).

Tips:

- Include a disclaimer on your profile and posts: "Views are your own and do not represent your employer or anyone who contracts your services" (HCPC, 2017).
- Consider maintaining separate private and professional profiles (HCPC, 2017).
- Keep posts confidential: Information shared online can be quickly copied and redistributed (HCPC, 2017).
- Avoid using language that could be considered inappropriate or offensive (HCPC, 2017).
- Follow your employer's social media policy (HCPC, 2017).
- Most people use social media without issues; if in doubt, seek advice.

By adhering to these guidelines and best practices, healthcare professionals can navigate social media effectively, benefiting from its advantages while maintaining professional standards and public trust.

We now have a quick quiz that you can scan the QR code to test your knowledge during the session. (https://quizizz.com/embed/quiz/6660b30f6ca1e6bf3d9ab9ef). You can access the social media audience on the HCPC website, and we also recommend familiarising yourself with the HCPC Student Codes of Practice. We will leave a link for this on the end slide. Thank you for listening.

References

Legislation:
Data Protection Act (2018).
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988).

Sources:
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