
Focus on standards – social networking sites

More and more people are using social networking sites or blogs to communicate with friends and family. Registrants, educators and individuals studying to join the professions we regulate sometimes contact us to ask our views on the use of these sites. We recognise that these sites are a useful way of communicating and sharing information with friends and colleagues. Information placed on social networking sites is in the public domain and can therefore be viewed by other people.

We rarely need to take action over a registrant's use of social networking sites. We would only take action about a registrant using such a site if it raised concerns about their fitness to practise. For example, if we found out that a registrant had put confidential information about a service user in their blog or on their Facebook page.

You should make sure that when you use the sites, your usage is consistent with the standards that we set. The relevant standards from the standards of conduct, performance and ethics are as follows.

- You must act in the best interests of service users.
- You must respect the confidentiality of service users.
- You must keep high standards of personal conduct.
- You must behave with honesty and integrity and make sure that your behaviour does not damage the public's confidence in you or your profession.

The full standards of conduct, performance and ethics are available on our website at www.hcpc-uk.org/publications. If you are a student, you can find similar principles in the guidance for students on conduct and ethics, which is also available on our website.

When you post information on social networking sites, think about whether it is appropriate to share that information. If the information is confidential and is about your service user, patient, client or colleague, you should not put it on a site. This could include information about their personal life, health or circumstances.

You may use social networking sites to share your views and opinions. Again, this is not something that we would normally be concerned about. However, we might need to take action if the comments posted were offensive, for example if they were racist or sexually explicit.

Social networking sites are a part of many registrants' and students' everyday life. We do not have any concerns about you using these sites, so long as you do so within the standards that we set.

This article is part of a series looking at our standards. We would welcome any comments you may have about this article or any suggestions of topics for the future. You can contact us by emailing policy@hcpc-uk.org