

Social Media Policy for employees, office and post holding members, other College members, trustees and patient and carer representatives

May 2026

1. Foreword

Social media can be a helpful platform for employees, office and post holding members, other College members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives, to share valuable insights and hold impactful conversations. It can also be an important networking and development tool for all professionals. At the same time, misusing personal or professional social media accounts risks damaging the reputation of the College, the reputation of the psychiatrist, the psychiatric profession and can unintentionally contribute to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

In a 24-hour, constantly evolving media landscape, journalists look to social media for stories and comment. It's also a hotbed for emotive and at times, antagonistic debate. The work of the College, and trust in its membership, can be seriously and adversely affected in a short period.

This guide is not intended to deter members, or those working within the College, from participating in honest debate, or sharing professional information and ideas on social media. It is aligned with the College values, Code of Conduct, and the General Medical Council's (GMC) Good Medical Practice guidance, to set a reasonable expectation of conduct for social media use.

Dr Lade Smith CBE, President and Sonia Walter, Chief Executive Officer, RCPsych.

2. Purpose of the document

This document highlights how the College expects all employees, office and post holding members, other College members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives to conduct themselves on social media and social networking sites, when publishing posts or blogs, commenting, or when creating or participating in any other form of online material including videos and podcasts.

It applies to use which is related in any way to the College and the work of the College, as well as personal use that may affect / impact the College in some way.

It also includes a reminder to the College membership of the requirement to comply with the GMC guidance relating to social media. This policy is intended to be supplementary to the GMC guidance.

Nothing in this policy is intended to suppress or prevent open, respectful discussion and debate.

3. To whom does this policy apply?

This policy applies to all employees, office and post holding members, other College members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives.

For this policy, all sections apply to office and role holding members, trustees, employees, and patients and carer representatives.

Sections 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,16, 17, 24, 25, 27-34 apply to the whole membership of the College not just office and role holders.

4. What do we mean by social media?

By 'social media' we mean X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, WordPress, YouTube, WhatsApp, or any other online platform where comments can be published to a network of people, which can be viewed publicly, shared and/or commented on. It also includes your responses to other people's content.

5. Using personal social media accounts to promote and discuss the work of the College

The College welcomes employees, office and role holding members and non-role holding members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives supporting College communications by promoting positive messages about the work of the College on social media.

There are many ways to do this, including:

- Sharing posts from College accounts
- Liking posts published by the College
- Creating your own posts to publish positive messages about the work of the College and your work area in particular

- Positively and respectfully engaging the wider public in the work of the College and psychiatry

6. Using social media accounts to contact College staff about College business

Please refrain from using social media to contact College staff about College business. Instead, please use this link: [Contact the College](#)

College staff are not obliged to accept followers or to respond to messages on social media, if these are related to College business.

7. Have separate accounts for work use and personal use

We recommend that, rather than having social media accounts on which you publish posts about both your work and your personal life, you consider having separate accounts for each, where possible.

Although you would own both accounts, creating separate accounts for work and personal content will help to ensure that:

- you can tailor your posts appropriately to the target audience.
- you can keep a clear separation between your professional and personal posts.

Please bear in mind, however, that even if you do have separate accounts for work and personal purposes, when you are posting from a personal account (particularly one which is publicly accessible) you may still be seen as connected to or affiliated with the College. We therefore ask that you bear in mind and adhere to the values and codes of conduct of the College whenever posting content which relates to the College, the work of the College, your role with the College or which may affect the College in any way.

8. No requirement to post

While the College encourages you to engage with our social media content, the creation and maintenance of a personal social media account is entirely voluntary and not a requirement of your employment or engagement with us.

Should you choose to have a personal social media presence, you are under no obligation to make your profile public, nor are you required to share, like, or promote College content or campaigns on your private channels. We respect your right to digital privacy, and any decision to remain offline or keep your personal profiles private will have no bearing on your standing within the College.

9. Declare your conflicts of interest

All Officers and role holding members, employees, patients and carers, are required to declare any conflicts of interest (COI), if relevant when posting content on social media, to protect yours and the College reputation. It is important to be transparent if you have a personal, financial, or professional connection to the content you are publishing.

To do this, your biography can contain a general statement, such as 'I sit on the board of (name of organisation)' but beyond that, conflicts of interest tend to be contextual, so you should state your conflict of interest within posts / the conversational thread you are involved in, each time it is relevant to the posts you are publishing.

If there is not enough room for all the information you want to convey, consider linking to a digital page where your COI's can be read, and state that this is a link to your COIs.

If you have any COI, please consider whether you should post.

Examples of conflicts of interest might be:

- A situation where you stand to gain financially, directly, or indirectly, eg. if you post recommending the use of a drug which is manufactured largely or entirely by one pharmaceutical company, and you have shares in that company.
- A situation where you stand to gain in some other way, eg. if you post promoting an event, organisation, or scheme, in which its success will directly benefit you reputationally or in some other non-financial way.
- Promoting a service, you gain financially from.
- Promoting a digital product, you would gain financially from.

Please flag any potential areas of concerns with the College's Digital team.
webteam@rcpsych.ac.uk

10. Protecting your privacy

Take steps to protect your privacy on social media to help safeguard your personal information and minimise the risks associated with sharing personal information.

Be extremely cautious about revealing personal details about yourself, and do not reveal personal details about other people. Don't reveal personal contact details such as phone numbers, email addresses, or postal addresses.

Each social media platform provides guidance on how to stay safe online.

[Protecting your identity - YouTube Help](#)

[Privacy and security on TikTok](#)

[Basic privacy settings and tools | Facebook Help Centre](#)

[How to protect and unprotect your Posts | X Help](#)

[How do I change my privacy settings on Snapchat? – Snapchat Support](#)

[Manage your account and privacy settings | LinkedIn Help](#)

[Privacy settings and information | Instagram Help Centre](#)

11. Biography

If as an employee, office and post holding member, trustee, or patient and carer representative you have set up a social media account on which you post content which is partially or entirely related to the work of the College, we ask that you make clear the nature of your affiliation with the College in your biography, and that you keep it up to date.

If you disclose your affiliation with us in your profile or any social media postings, you must include the disclaimer “all views are my own and do not reflect the views of the College” (or otherwise make clear that your views do not represent those of the College) in your biography or post.

12. Posting content and commenting

When posting content or commenting on social media, you should be mindful that your posts or comments can have implications for the College’s business and reputation. This includes posts and comments which relate to the College, its work, or your role with the College, but also to personal posts and comments where you have outlined your affiliation with the College in your biography (or your affiliation with the College is otherwise known or apparent).

You should therefore ensure that your posts and comments don’t contravene College values, any applicable College code of conduct or any other professional rules or codes of conduct which may apply to you.

All Officers, role holders, employees, trustees, patients, and carers are bound by all relevant College policies and codes of conduct.

- [Core values for psychiatrists](#)
- [Our values and behaviours](#)
- RCPsych employees, patient, and carer codes of conduct: [Human Resources](#)

Remember, when publishing on your social media accounts

- you are publishing content either to a network of people, or to be viewed publicly. Either way you should consider your posts as you would a letter to a journal or a blog, with the same level of professionalism, standards, and tone.
- you are always representing the College, and if you are expressing a view that doesn't represent the College's stance, you should make that clear in whatever you post.

13. Politics

Employees, office and role holding members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives who have responsibility for relationships with politicians, decision makers and/or stakeholder organisations must take particular care if they have personal accounts and use these to promote College work. In such circumstances, you should not make statements that are political or that could compromise College stakeholder and decision maker relationships.

Official College social media accounts should be politically neutral. Content should be non-partisan and not endorse, promote, or show favouritism towards any one political party, candidate, or platform.

14. Endorsement

Please avoid tagging or mentioning other organisations when posting on behalf of the College unless the College have done this already in a related post. Tagging is an endorsement. If you are keen to endorse a product / report etc, not already endorsed by the College, please follow the endorsement policy [Processes for producing College publications, consultations, surveys and endorsements.](#)

15. Avoid responding to negative comments about the College or College work

Please avoid responding to negative comments about the College on behalf of the College. Instead, raise the negative comments with the College's Digital team in the first instance. The digital team can be contacted on: webteam@rcpsych.ac.uk.

16. Doctors using personal social media for work reasons, including posts about patients

Members who are practising doctors should familiarise themselves, and always comply, with the GMC guidance - *Good medical practice* and its specific guidance *Using social media as a medical professional*.

Please follow the GMC social media guidance on posting and patients. The policy provides clear guidance including regarding confidentiality, privacy, and dignity.

[Good medical practice - professional standards - GMC](#)

[Using social media as a medical professional - GMC](#)

Contact on social media with patients

Do not accept “friend” or “follow” requests from patients on your personal accounts, to ensure maintenance of professional boundaries.

Do not use social media to provide specific, individualised medical advice.

If you receive a direct message (DM) from a patient, please direct them to an official channel, or emergency services, if appropriate.

Commenting on clinical encounters with patients

The patient-clinician relationship relies on trust which can be seriously impacted by any public commentary by the clinician about the patient on social media.

The GMC provides guidance on disclosing personal information about patients and includes common law, data protection law, and human rights law. The guidance also supports any legal differences due to devolved legislation. GMC guidance on confidentiality: [Confidentiality: good practice in handling patient information - professional standards - GMC](#)

17. Commenting in a professional capacity on someone you have not examined

Do not comment on the mental health of public figures, or anyone you have not examined as a patient.

The College strongly supports the “[Goldwater Rule](#)” and adhering to it is important as part of maintaining confidence in the profession.

18. Using RCPsych social media accounts to promote and discuss the work of the College

The College has accounts on a range of social media channels - X, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. We also have a wide range of sub accounts on X covering different areas of the College (Devolved Nations, Division, Faculties, Resident Doctors, Journals, NCCMH, and CCQI)

If you wish to create a new College social media account, please do not do so without contacting the Head of Digital on webteam@rcpsych.ac.uk first, who will explain the process.

If you manage one of these accounts, please note the College's policy to use only the College's standard logo as the account's profile picture (that is, the logo at the top of this document) with no alterations. The College's Digital team will help set up your account, so it is compliant with this policy.

If you post, comment or otherwise create content on a College account, you must comply with the expected behaviours and conduct set out in this document.

The College maintains oversight of all College social media accounts. Content that violates the College policies can be removed immediately.

19. AI and synthetic content

Any employees, office and role holding members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives using social media please declare and clearly label any use of AI or any other synthetically created content. Please ALWAYS check for accuracy with anything generated using AI.

20. Misinformation

Any employees, office and role holding members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives using social media please do not share any misinformation. Check for accuracy any information you are sharing.

21. Design and tone of voice

There are College guidelines to support consistency in terms of design and tone of voice on the College social media platforms. Please ensure that you comply with these style guides when using College social media accounts.

For more information, please refer to our style guides:

[Style guide for X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)

[Style guide for Facebook](#)

[Style guide for YouTube](#)

[Style guide for Instagram](#)

22. Standards of behaviour and conduct when using social media

Employees, office and role holding members, trustees, and patient and carer representatives using social media (as described above), where such use relates to the College, the work of the College, their role with the College or which may affect the College in any way, must comply with the following standards of behaviour and conduct at all times:

- You are personally responsible for your posts and comments, which will be published on the internet and may be viewed publicly. They can be hard to delete once published and may remain online for a long time. Reflect carefully on these guidelines before publishing content or commenting.
- Make sure content and comments are appropriate.
- Take care, and use your best judgment, to ensure that you post material and make comments that are appropriate, respectful and do not contravene any applicable rules, regulations, or laws.
- Each social media channel has a set of terms and conditions, including around appropriate use; you should be familiar with these and comply with them.
- If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from posting it until you have discussed it with your line manager or other appropriate manager or senior College member.

23. Handling historical posting for new role holders

When members step into College roles, due to increased visibility, their historical posts on personal social media accounts can come under greater scrutiny.

Even though these posts are personal and therefore not directly subject to DCC disciplinary processes, they can still create reputational harm if the content is not aligned with the College's values or code of conduct. The age of a post does not reduce its potential impact, as public perception tends to focus on the content itself rather than when it was created.

If past content emerges that poses a reputational risk, the College could consider taking proportionate action in line with internal policies, the Charity Commission's expectations, and relevant legal obligations, depending on the severity and potential impact of the risk.

To help mitigate this risk, the College requires all new officer and role holders, and trustees to:

- review past social media posts for any not aligned with the College values, code of conduct, College position, GMC guidance, conflicts of interest etc.

- raise any concerns with the Director of Strategic Communications – corinne.bishop@rcpsych.ac.uk
- the College will conduct a risk assessment of these posts.
- the College will consider a proportionate response in collaboration with the relevant member and governance.

Responses are not limited to but can include – preparing a statement and asking for the post to be taken down.

If historical content emerges that poses a reputational risk to the College, including where concerns arise because the individual may be, or could have been, acting in a College role, the College may consider taking proportionate action in line with internal policies. This could include progressing concerns under the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee Regulations.

24. Be respectful

Respect other people; posts and comments should not be abusive, intimidating, harassing, discriminatory, defamatory, or offensive in nature, and should not be made to deliberately provoke others.

We recommend that replies to any disagreements or negative comments are always kept polite and professional, regardless of how hostile or challenging these may be. One should remain mindful and understanding of differences of experiences. It might at times be preferable to ‘agree to disagree’ without getting into protracted debates.

If, in the context of content or a post relating to the College or its work, you feel provoked by what you consider to be a negative or personal comment, please try not to respond and contact the RCPsych Digital team on webteam@rcpsych.ac.uk in the first instance.

25. Do not publish inappropriate content or comments

Do not publish content or images which:

- Are defamatory or disparaging.
- Are harassing or bullying.
- Are discriminatory.
- Are false or misleading or impersonate colleagues or third parties.

26. Do not damage the College’s reputation

Be aware of the effects your actions on social media may have on your professional reputation, as well as the reputation of the RCPsych as an organisation and its employees and members (in the broader sense of the definition).

- You must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the reputation of the RCPsych.
- You must not express opinions on our behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by your manager or a senior College member.
- Do not publish confidential information.
- Do not publish, post, or release anything publicly which is confidential or not intended to be seen by the public. For example, you must not post comments about sensitive business-related topics or do anything to jeopardise our confidential information or intellectual property. If you are unsure about what is considered confidential, please check with the College's Human Resources department.
- When posting in relation to the work of the College, do not promote commercial products and services.
- When publishing in relation to a College event, please make sure the speaker has given permission for the talk to be covered on social media, and/or for pictures of the speaker and their slides to be published (as applicable). There are some instances where social media coverage of any form is prohibited, or information from some slides is not for sharing more broadly than with those in the room. There are also instances where photos and videos are not permitted. It is also important to consider, for example, that one post from a one-hour seminar does not convey the context and can land very differently on social media and have unintended consequences because of this, for example, cause offence. It is also important to always understand the policy at any given event and seek consent for publication before doing so.

27. Comply with safeguarding and GDPR requirements

When publishing content and images, please comply with the College's policy on safeguarding and GDPR and seek consent from any applicable third parties in advance of publication.

You must get appropriate permission before referring to, or posting content or images relating to, current or former employees, workers, members (in the broader sense of the definition), patient and carer representatives, vendors, or suppliers.

You must get appropriate permission to use a third party's copyrighted or trademarked material, or other intellectual property (including text, quotes, logos, and images).

When posting a picture be careful not to include confidential information or information you have not obtained consent to post by mistake, including (but not limited to) addresses on envelopes or stickers on laptops.

28. Refer media enquiries to the College

If you are approached by the media on social media, please do not talk on behalf of the College or as a College spokesperson without referring the enquiry to the media team, in the Strategic Communications department, or the Devolved Nations Senior Media Officer. The Strat Comms email address is press@recpsych.ac.uk and phone number: 07860 755896. The DN email address is press@recpsych.ac.uk and phone number: 07841009224.

29. Adhere to College values and codes of conduct

The College's values underpin everything we do and must be taken into account when posting in relation to RCPsych or its work, and in circumstances where your post may affect the College in any way.

30. Uphold the College's 'Core Values for Psychiatrists'

In addition, Members should consider the RCPsych Core values for psychiatrists:

Communication: successfully conveying or sharing of information, ideas, and feelings

Dignity: being worthy of respect

Empathy: showing the ability to understand and share the feelings of another

Fairness: treating people equally without favoritism or discrimination

Honesty: truthful and sincere

Humility: having a modest view of one's importance

Respect: due regard for the feelings, wishes, or rights of others

Trust: firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone

Members should also consider the RCPsych Framework for Senior College Office Holders and Other College Post Holders and comply with the associated code of conduct.

31. Report misuse of social media to the College

If you become aware of any misuse of social media, or if you see social media content which disparages or reflects poorly on the College, you should report this to the College's Head of Digital using webteam@rcpsych.ac.uk

32. If you feel you are being bullied or harassed

We encourage employees, the membership, trustees, and patient and carer representatives to block, and if appropriate report any users they feel are bullying, harassing, or insulting them on their personal social media accounts.

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed on a College social media account, or by a College member, employee, trustee, or patient and carer representative, please refer to the applicable College anti-bullying and harassment policy for further information on how to escalate your concerns.

For members, please refer to the Disciplinary Complaints Committee [Making a complaint](#)

33. Breaches of this policy

All employees, the membership, trustees, and carer and patient representatives are required to adhere to this policy.

College employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action under the applicable College disciplinary policy. Serious breaches of this policy - for example, incidents of bullying or harassment of colleagues, or social media activity causing serious damage to the College or its reputation - may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal.

We ask that any member, trustee, patient, and carer representative collaborate with us in informing us and reviewing any possible breaches of this policy to help ensure best practice.

It may be necessary at times to request the removal of social media content, should there be a significant risk to the reputation and work of the College.

As the legal owners and administrators of the College accounts, we will remove content on the College channels that poses a risk for the College and its community.

Complaints about a members conduct on social media will be directed to the Disciplinary Complaints Committee [Making a complaint](#).

34. The status of this policy

This policy does not form part of the contracts of employment of any College employees or workers, and we may amend it from time to time as we consider appropriate.