

# Social Media Policy ABDO

## Purpose of the Guidelines

The aim of these guidelines is to help:

- Protect and support staff / members acting on behalf of the organisation contributing to, and engaging with, social media
- Encourage good practice and consistency across the organisation's online activities
- Promote the effective use of social media
- Protect the reputation of the organisation, its staff, members and partner organisations
- Protect patients.

'The organisation' refers to the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, to be referred to as ABDO.

## Scope of the Guidelines

These social media guidelines are aimed at staff and members who use, or intend to use, social media as part of their work on behalf of the organisation. These guidelines also apply to staff and members' personal use of social media in and out of working hours where their comments could be taken to reflect on the organisation. This could include handling member queries, promoting ABDO events, updates on organisational news, communication between staff and/ or between members. This does not cover personal use of social media, such as communicating with friends and family.

## Introduction

Social media, where people network, comment and share online, is now a part of everyday life. According to the ONS, the internet was used daily or almost daily by 82% of adults (41.8 million) in Great Britain in 2016, compared with 78% (39.3 million) in 2015 and 35% (16.2 million) in 2006. 89% of households in Great Britain (23.7 million) had internet access, an increase from 86% in 2015 and 57% in 2006. Per the most recent data, 63% of adults use the internet for social media. 51% of adult internet users have used it to look for health information. <sup>i</sup>

Despite the opportunities presented by social media, there are risks. Social media allows individuals to communicate with a potentially huge audience. Unlike traditional media it is all about two-way communication, with immediate publication of comments, and debates can become heated. Its informality can encourage us to be less cautious than we would be using other more traditional methods of communicating and interacting.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and Snapchat are all examples of social media. For the purposes of this policy we do not include email.

## Policy framework

These guidelines fit within:

- GOC standards
- ABDO professional conduct advice and guidelines

## General Optical Council - Codes of Conduct

The General Optical Council (GOC) Codes of Conduct<sup>ii</sup> apply to online activity and communication just as much as to face-to-face contact.

Social media is specifically mentioned in the following points, where registrants should:

*“14.3 Maintain confidentiality when communicating publicly, including speaking to or writing in the media, or writing online including on social media.”*

*“17.2 Ensure your conduct in the online environment, particularly in relation to social media, whether or not connected to your professional practice, does not damage public confidence in you or your profession.”*

Beyond that, several of the standards Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants are particularly relevant to professionalism in the virtual world: 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17, as follows

As an optometrist or dispensing optician you must:

2. Communicate effectively with your patients
3. Obtain valid consent
11. Protect and safeguard patients, colleagues and others from harm
12. Ensure a safe environment for your patients
14. Maintain confidentiality and respect your patients' privacy
15. Maintain appropriate boundaries with others
16. Be honest and trustworthy
17. Do not damage the reputation of your profession through your conduct

Registrants should download the standards and consider how each point reflects on social media use.

The Code of Conduct for Business Registrants<sup>iii</sup> contains the following key provisions:

2. Require as a condition of employment or engagement that those individual registrants currently employed or otherwise engaged to provide optical services comply with the GOC's Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians or the Standards for Optical Students;
3. Not knowingly act in a way which might contribute to or cause a breach of the Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants by any individual registrant employed or otherwise engaged by it to provide optical services;
6. Respect and protect confidential information for both patients and employees in accordance with current legislation;
8. Provide mechanisms to enable those that work for or are otherwise engaged by the business registrant to raise concerns about risks to patients;
10. Ensure that the criteria enshrined in this code are applied as may be appropriate to registered medical practitioners in relation to the GMC and any other relevant codes and guidance.

Business registrants should download the standards and consider how each point reflects on social media use.

## Association of British Dispensing Opticians – Advice and Guidelines on Professional Conduct

The first paragraph of the ABDO Professional Conduct guidelines lay a good foundation for approaching social media as an optician:

1.1.1 Dispensing opticians shall always place the welfare of the public, who require their professional services, before all other considerations. They shall behave in a proper manner towards their patients, the GOC, ABDO and professional colleagues and shall not bring them or the profession into disrepute. They must maintain a high standard of behaviour, integrity and competence, bringing to bear all their knowledge, skill and expertise in serving the public. Dispensing opticians should be aware that conviction for any non-optical offence may cause them to appear before the GOC for bringing the profession into disrepute, and subsequently be reported to ABDO.

Staff and members should also study section 1.11 Professional Publicity and 1.12 Media Relations to guide their use of social media.

## Potential social media pitfalls for optical professionals and businesses<sup>iv</sup>

### Breaches of confidentiality

Take all care to ensure that you send information only to those for whom it is intended. If social media activity involves patient details, even inadvertently, this can result in a breach of confidentiality.

If you use social media to vent or to communicate informally with colleagues, take care not to inadvertently disclose confidential information in the process, in a single post or cumulatively over several exchanges over time.

### Blurring professional and private boundaries

It is easy to accept a friend request from a patient without considering the consequences. Avoid blurring personal and professional boundaries and keep personal social media for personal contacts. Patients should be encouraged to follow the practice social media rather than the professional's personal account. Consider the name you use for personal social media and whether it should be different to that which you use in practice.

Similarly, when socialising with colleagues, consider the consequences of sharing on social media. In particular, ensure you have consent before sharing photographs.

### Bringing the profession into disrepute

You are accountable for what you write online, under your own name or an alias. You need to maintain professional standards at all time, even on seemingly anonymous fora. A helpful guideline is to only write what you would be happy saying out loud to the person in question. When sharing photos of others, ensure that you have their permission, and that the photos also maintain the standards of the profession.

### Adversely impacting upon ongoing regulatory proceedings

It is now possible for a practitioner under investigation to find comments posted on-line influencing that investigation. A comment revealing a lack of insight or disrespect for the proceedings can have unfortunate consequences if brought to the attention of the regulator.

### Staff and member responsibilities

It is your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the principles of these guidelines, and regularly check the website for any updates to documents.

It is also your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the rules and guidelines set out by individual social media, social networking and website hosting companies and providers.

On-line professional conduct should mirror your conduct in the real world: if you would not say or do it in real life, you should not say or do it online. You must:

- Act lawfully in the use of social media and to be aware that criminal and civil proceedings can be taken in the event of unlawful activity. If you break the law on social media sites (for example by posting something defamatory - an unjustified statement about a person or organisation that may harm their reputation) you will be personally responsible.
- Remain mindful of, and respect, the regulations of ABDO

- Not use social media to inform or promote inappropriate behaviour or actions which damage the reputation of individuals or ABDO
- Remember to follow the anonymity and confidentiality rules set out by ABDO
- Not use social media to attack others. Think before you post. Do not post personal or derogatory comments about patients or colleagues. Your comments can circulate more widely than you intend. Posts, pictures, images, status updates and other content can remain permanently online. Ensure your on-line conduct is always consistent with your professional obligations.
- Remember to respect other people's privacy and feelings. Never share confidential patient information on-line. The sum of information posted may breach confidentiality even if each individual post does not.
- Always ask permission before sharing private details about your fellow members, staff, ABDO, its partner organisations and clients. Such details could include private contact details, pictures or details of private discussions.
- Remember to be appropriate when engaging with staff, members or patients through social media. Inappropriate information or contact may breach the Disciplinary Procedures.
- Keep your personal and professional life separate. Check your privacy settings to control what information you share with whom, while also proceeding on the basis that information you intend to be private could become public. Review settings regularly as they can change.
- Avoid accepting requests from patients or former patients to become on-line "friends". This increases the risk of boundary transgressions. A username not linked to your profession is one option, but it does not guarantee anonymity: your comments may still be traced back to you.
- Adhere to all ethical requirements of ABDO when using social media. You must consider privacy, consent, intellectual property rights, copyright and ownership of data.
- Not state or imply that your views are those of ABDO when using social media
- Not use ABDO logo at any time.

If you see something on a social media site that concerns you, you can report it to the social media provider. The provider should pass the complaint to the person who set up the space or group.

## Behaviour and conduct on social media

Any misconduct on social media will be dealt with by ABDO disciplinary procedures. This could include:

- Foul and abusive language
- Discrimination
- Violence and threats
- Bullying and harassment
- Hateful speech
- Racism
- Inappropriate graphic content
- Inflammatory comments, arousing or intending to arouse feelings of anger or violence
- Deliberately misleading or defamatory comments, damaging the good reputation of someone, whether slanderous or libellous
- Phishing and spam.

## Additional advice for Bodies Corporate

Corporate registrants may wish to consider the following important questions: <sup>v</sup>

- Have you issued clear guidance and policies to your employees on the use of social networking sites and other on-line communication forms?
- Have you linked your guidance and policies to the relevant up to date sections of the GOC code of conduct?
- Are your managers trained in enforcing the relevant policies and dealing with complaints arising from Internet misuse?
- Are there adequate systems in place to protect patient confidentiality?
- Do you have a clear procedure for dealing with complaints about on-line activity, such as cyber bullying?
- Do you have a clear whistle-blowing procedure to avoid concerned employees raising issues on-line?
- Are all relevant policies and procedures suitably publicised and circulated to all employees?

## Monitoring the use of social media and ABDO responsibilities

ABDO will:

- Ensure these guidelines are accessible to staff and members acting on behalf of ABDO.
- Take steps to give staff and members the information to stay safe on the internet when using social media.
- Monitor references to ABDO on social media and the internet and respond to complaints regarding staff and member conduct on social media.
- Take disciplinary action where inappropriate behaviour is exhibited that affects ABDO in accordance with ABDO Disciplinary Procedures.
- Periodically review and update the guidelines and any other associated policy and guidelines. Staff and members will be notified of any significant changes.

**Date guidelines agreed: 19/01/2017**

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<sup>i</sup> Office of National Statistics Statistical bulletin: Internet access – households and individuals: 2016  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2016> accessed 30 November 2016

<sup>ii</sup> Standards for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians issued 1 April 2016  
[https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/Standards\\_for\\_optometrists\\_dispensing\\_opticians.cfm](https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/Standards_for_optometrists_dispensing_opticians.cfm) accessed 30 November 2016

<sup>iii</sup> Standards for Optical Businesses  
[https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/Standards\\_for\\_optical\\_businesses.cfm](https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/Standards_for_optical_businesses.cfm) accessed 30 November 2016

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted and updated from Advice prepared by Nailah Mears of Berryman's Lace Mawer for the Optical Confederation. 3 September 2012

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