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PSNC Briefing 001/17: Social media guide for community pharmacy teams and LPCs

This PSNC Briefing provides community pharmacy teams and LPCs with a guide to help them to consider the benefits of using Twitter and other social media as tools for keeping up to date with pharmacy and healthcare news or communicating with patients and other stakeholders.

This guide covers the benefits of using social media and guidance on creating internal policies for its use, plus it has three appendices providing practical pointers on how to use the most relevant social media platforms:

1. **Twitter**, which gets key messages out to a lot of people very quickly;
2. **Facebook**, which gets information directly to your followers in a social setting; and
3. **LinkedIn**, which gets news to your network through a professional site (probably more beneficial for LPCs).

These appendices can be downloaded [here](#).

What social media can do

Promoting important messages about the services you offer or changes to your opening hours during holiday periods could be made easier by using social media platforms such as Twitter. Reminding patients that you offer the NHS flu jab, sharing details of a new local pharmacy service or asking your MP to support you in the face of Government cuts – just a few examples to illustrate how social media can be used to help your pharmacy communicate effectively.

Best practice procedures

Remember that an account bearing your pharmacy's name effectively represents it on social media. You will therefore need to keep it separate from your own personal social media accounts. If you do want to Tweet as yourself, perhaps consider creating an additional 'work' account, but also note that you must remain professional.

Before using social media for your pharmacy or LPC, please be aware that it is intended to be a two-way communication so you should expect people to interact with your messages. There is likely to be a public dialogue between you and your followers so be prepared and have a plan for both positive and negative comments.

Prepare for how to use a pharmacy social media account by establishing simple but important rules about how to use and share them with everyone who will have access. To help you create a plan, please consider the following aspects of your social media communications.

a) Agree on your key messages

Everyone who posts from your social media account needs to agree on what you should (and shouldn't) be sending or sharing messages about. Here are some likely topics:

- Advertising the services your pharmacy offers (state if it is funded by the NHS);
- Reminding patients of your opening hours (especially around holiday periods);
- Keeping patients updated on news about your pharmacy or wider healthcare issues;
- Showcasing what your pharmacy (or LPC) is doing for the local community; and
- Asking politicians or charity groups to support their local pharmacies.

The content for each week/month could be agreed in advance at regular pharmacy meetings.

b) Decide how to manage the workload

Consider setting up an auto-posting service that will use your website's RSS feed to automatically post your news stories on social media accounts (guidance can be found [here](#)). Alternatively, there are other services, such as [Hootsuite](#) or [Social Oomph](#), that allow you to write posts which can be scheduled to send when your followers are more likely to see them. This allows you to set up several posts for the week (or month) all in one go.

It is also important to have someone who monitors your social media accounts so that you can respond to comments as well as get involved in conversations about local or national healthcare issues. Make sure the nominated person knows what to look out for – i.e. what are users saying about pharmacy or healthcare? – and how you would want to respond. You may want to implement a rule to only send posts that have been previously agreed with the pharmacy owner or manager.

Beyond sending your own posts, you can also retweet, 'like' or share other's posts. When sharing or liking someone else's posts, please remember this action may be interpreted as approving an opinion, organisation or even clinical advice. Consider what you share as carefully as you would consider one of your own posts. More information about how to retweet, like or share posts can be found in the appendices to this PSNC Briefing.

Finally, how often will you post? The number of times a company posts per week depends on the size of the organisation and how many followers it has. For small businesses, such as pharmacies, it has been suggested that you should post at least twice a week but no more once per day (unless you have an urgent message) to maintain your followers' interest without bombarding them. This is only an estimation and is not meant to include times when you retweet or share someone else's post.

Some pharmacies also make it clear in their profile description when they will respond to comments (e.g. 9-6 Mon-Sat). There are some tips on the best times of day to send posts in the 'Analyse your impact' section below.

c) Identify the risks

Possible risk	How to reduce it
Messages can get lost when written with the limited number of characters available on Twitter or in a short Facebook post.	Where possible try to link to further information on your (or someone else's) website.
Posts from followers go unanswered.	Before you start using social media, decide who will be responsible for sending posts and checking the account for comments from others (see 'Decide how to manage the workload' section above).
Incorrect or inappropriate information is given out.	Make sure you only give login details to those you trust and that you set boundaries about what to post. Staff members should also know who to go to if they are unsure of how to answer a post or message sent to the social media account.
The informal nature of some social media platforms could mean your posts are only seen outside of work hours.	This is not necessarily an issue for pharmacy accounts, but LPCs may wish to avoid using social media as the only method of sending out urgent messages.
It is easier for negative attention to come your way.	To avoid negative messages appearing on your website, make sure any Twitter feed you display does not show replies from other users (guidance is available for LPCs using a PSNC template in our separate guide). You should also consider not permitting other users to post on your Facebook wall (see the 'How to use Facebook' appendix).

Answering difficult queries with a limited number of characters or in a short post could cause confusion.	In the event of complaints or negative interactions, deal with them quickly and as professionally as you would a written or verbal complaint. Consider responding privately (using a private message or perhaps emailing them directly if possible) rather than having the conversation in a public space.* Remember that you do not want to be dragged into an ongoing argument, so aim to resolve in one message or take the discussion offline.
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*One process that could be used to handle negative queries could be as follows:

- Immediately share the exact wording with the pharmacy owner or manager;
- Respond to the comment only once the pharmacy owner or manager has agreed a response;
- Monitor further comments closely until the situation has been resolved; and
- If the comment is non-constructive then consider politely asking the person who wrote the message if they would consider taking the discussion offline and for the message to be removed.

d) Promote your social media account/page

Only those who follow your Twitter account, 'like' your Facebook page or 'connect with' your LinkedIn page will see all your posts so you will need to let people know the name of the account/page via your website or in other communications with your patients and/or stakeholders.

e) Learn from others

Why not take a look at what other pharmacies or LPCs post about or share with their followers? This can help you get a better idea of what your own followers might be interested in hearing about from you. It may also help you decide how often to post and what style of language to use.

f) Analyse your impact

Twitter has its own in-built analytics which can give you a lot of information about how successful your tweets are and how much activity your account is generating. When you are on your timeline, select your profile picture on the top right, then select 'Analytics' from the menu that appears. Here you will be presented with an overview showing key statistics and a selection of your most popular tweets from the current and previous months. Further information can be found by selecting 'All Tweet Activity' under any one of the monthly sections. Additionally, websites such as [Followerwonk](#) can help assess your followers so you can determine the best time of day to tweet.

Facebook's analytics section is called 'Insights': when on your page, select 'Insights' from the tabs at the top, then use the left-hand menu to navigate around. 'Posts' is the most interesting section as it will show you how popular yours have been. At the top, you are also presented with the most popular days and times of the week for your posts; this can help you determine when is best to publish your posts.

LinkedIn also has its own in-built analytics: when on your page, select 'Analytics' from the tabs at the top. Here you will be presented key statistics about your posts and followers. This data display works in a similar way to Facebook's analytics. Further information is available by selecting the 'Notifications' tab, which provides an at-a-glance display of your page's activity that day as well as a total for the month.

Key terms:

Impressions or Reach – how many users saw a post.

Engagements or Interactions – the number of times users engage with a post (clicking, sharing, liking or commenting).

g) Deactivating your account

Finally, if you are unable to post on a regular basis and monitor comments from others, then it is best to remove the account. Having an inactive account may create a negative impression of the pharmacy, particularly if patients try to contact you using it. You can close your account on the Account Settings page by clicking 'Deactivate my account'.

Tips for LPCs

- If you would like to add a Twitter feed to your LPC website, please see our [separate guide](#).
- LPC Members may wish to set up their own social media accounts and give additional support to the main LPC account via re-posting or creating extra posts about LPC news and resources.
- If you have a bit more resource, you could appoint a social media representative to tailor your social media posts to your different audiences and help draw people to information you want them to read.

Further information

Key terms

Get familiar with the jargon:

- **Post:** a message sent using a social media platform such as Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.
- **Tweet:** a post unique to Twitter which only allows a maximum of 140 characters (including letters, numbers, punctuation and spaces).
- **Timeline:** a chronological list of social media activity.
- **Follower:** somebody who has chosen to allow all the messages you post to appear in their timeline.
- **Like:** when somebody wants to show that they agree with or approve of a post.
- **Retweet:** somebody shares a post with their own followers.
- **Reply:** when somebody comments on a post.
- **Mention:** when your username is included in a post.
- **Direct message:** private messages that can be exchanged between followers.
- **Promoted Tweet:** an advert that appears in your timeline.

Help pages for the relevant social media platforms:

- Twitter – support.twitter.com
- Facebook – www.facebook.com/help/364458366957655
- LinkedIn – www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin?trk=biz-company-login&lang=en

Or, to find out more about pharmacy IT, please visit: psnc.org.uk/it

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Melinda Mabbutt, Communications Officer](#).