



THE SOCIETY FOR  
VASCULAR TECHNOLOGY OF  
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

## **Social Media Policy**

The popularity and use of social media has grown rapidly in recent years. This document provides advice to SVT members in understanding how to balance transparency and confidentiality in their use of social media. This includes communicating, sharing and contributing to public commentary within the ever expanding applications of social media.

### **What is social media?**

Social media is a generic term to describe web-based applications that permit the creation and exchange of information. These may include information, ideas and picture or videos. Social media is designed to enable development of communities of people with a common interest and is widely used to enable communication between family and friends. It also has great potential for networking with other professionals and enhancing the patient experience, and is an important part of the Department of Health's 2012 'Power of Information strategy' <sup>1</sup>

Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. However any on-line space that permits sharing of information, for example web-site forums and mobile instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, are also forms of social media.

### **Where and how to communicate?**

The platform selected to communicate should be determined by the purpose of the communication. The following list covers some of the more commonly used platforms

and provides some examples of how they may be used in the diagnostic imaging context.

## **Twitter**

Twitter allows short (140 characters) messages, calling attention to a particular issue or directing the reader to other links, and is used by some hospital trusts. It allows rapid dissemination across a world-wide audience with no or little ability for restriction.

Searching for a relevant hashtag '#' allows a search on interesting topics (eg '#???????'), an '@' sign finds a particular person (eg '@???????').

Useful Vascular related Twitter links:

[@SVTGBI](https://twitter.com/svtgbi)

[@VascularNews](https://twitter.com/VascularNews?p=s)

[@VascularSociety](https://twitter.com/VSGBI?p=s)

## **Facebook**

Facebook is a popular social media site allowing the sharing of text and image media, and also networking with selected 'friends'. Unlike Twitter, users have some control over who can see their page, and can set up groups where small communities can share information around a common topic. However, there is often misunderstanding of what level of privacy is afforded so that users often disclose personal issues that can end up being shared in the public arena.

SVT Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Society-for-Vascular-Technology-of-Great-Britain-and-Ireland-242487485929239/?ref=nf> SVTGBI

## **Pinterest**

This is analogous to a noticeboard or scrapbook where users can 'pin' images which have links to other sites or resources. It's visual nature makes it ideal for displaying radiology related images and anatomical diagrams.

## **YouTube**

YouTube allows users to easily share and comment on video data, and is very popular due to visual media being easier to process than textual data.

## **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is essentially an on-line CV designed for professional networking, and allows for institutions and discussion boards to discuss topics and share links.

## **Blogs**

Blogs (web logs) and Vlogs (videologs) provide anyone the opportunity to be heard, without the peer review of traditional sources of publication, such as journals. The potential to reach a much wider audience should be balanced against the lack of censor or verification of facts.

## **ResearchGate**

ResearchGate has an academic focus and enables researchers to share their findings and forge research collaborations; it can be a useful resource for obtaining evidence for changes in practice. Those posting should be aware of any potential publisher copyright issues.

## **How to communicate using social media**

### **Personal digital footprint**

Every time someone posts in an on-line space they create a 'digital footprint' which is more or less visible depending on the location of the 'post'. Through social media we can create a professional competent profile, raise awareness of important professional issues, promote evidence-based practice and disseminate research. We can also share our profession-specific knowledge to inform and alleviate the concerns of the public.

We have a responsibility to uphold the reputation of our profession and exercise good and ethical judgement, respecting confidentiality and privacy in any public comment, whilst remembering that we are representing our profession and employer. If our employer's name appears in our personal profile then any comment made is deemed to be representing the views of our employer. Our digital footprint therefore has the potential to impact on how the public perceive our profession, our workplaces as well as individuals.

So whilst social media offers many opportunities for communication and collaboration, it also presents new and important responsibilities.

There is a belief that 'private' groups can eliminate some of these concerns, but this is a false assurance as written communication is always at risk of exposure into the public arena. Transparency and professional integrity in the use of these communications will minimise these risks.

### **General advice**

It is important to think carefully before sending any messages, considering the effect that posts will have on those reading it. As with e-mails, it is often a good idea to delay sending messages written during times of emotional upset and negativity. As with face-to-face communications, we should always consider the dignity and feelings of the recipient, once messages are posted they cannot be easily retracted. The time gap afforded by on-line media communications can provide advantage over face-to-face communications, giving space to think and respond wisely. All comments must be factual, not contain discriminatory or offensive language.

Internet 'trolling' is the deliberate posting of inflammatory messages to damage and disrupt the flow of information. This type of activity would be considered a breach of SVT, Health & Care Professions Council (hpc) and other professional body standards of professional conduct. If we witness trolling we do have a professional responsibility to point out the inappropriate nature of such behaviour. Victims of trolling are advised to withdraw from discussions and consider the use of 'reporting' and 'blocking' functions found in some social media platforms.

Think carefully before engaging in debates related to personal beliefs (such as religion or politics), as these can be misinterpreted as being endorsed by your profession. If you do engage in these sorts of discussion, you need to clearly state that these are your own beliefs.

We should also consider the appropriateness of usernames and 'handles', do these portray a professional image?

### **Legal requirements and code of professional conduct**

The legal requirements associated with on-line communication are no different to those with which we are familiar in our professional communications in the workplace.

When using social media it is important to be clear on whose behalf you are speaking – is it yourself or an organisation?

It is not appropriate for members to comment on behalf of the SVT in social media.

Removal of any reference to organisations in your social media profile may avoid this confusion. Many organisations have social media policies which specify that employees should not identify where they work social media profiles.

Openly criticising your employer on a social network could result in disciplinary action. Healthcare professionals should resist posting criticism of aspects of patient care or decisions made at meetings of which they are a member and have therefore taken collective responsibility.

### **Conclusions and further actions**

In summary, we need to be mindful of what our digital footprint says about us and our profession, both in our use of social media in relation to work and in our personal use.

It can be useful to perform an internet search for your name to see what information others can glean about you. Is this the identity that you, your fellow professionals and employer would wish you to portray?

### **Key points**

- Social media can blur the boundary between an individual's public and professional lives
- The ethical, professional and legal duty to protect information and confidentiality should also be applied to the use of social media
- Communication intended for friends or family may become more widely available.
- Image-sharing platforms (such as Pinterest, Instagram and Snapchat) have the danger that copyrighted and or confidential material might be uploaded without the required permissions (eg if patients are permitted to take images of themselves during an examination or request to take a photo of their image on a monitor, other patient data may be inadvertently captured)
- It is inappropriate to post personal or derogatory comments about patients or colleagues on public internet forums.
- Healthcare professionals are advised against accepting Facebook friend requests from patients.

- Healthcare professionals should be aware of their public on-line image and how this may impact on their individual and the wider profession.
- Never post something on-line that you would not be prepared to state in any public arena
- Think carefully before 'posting' when you are feeling emotional or negative about a particular issue, considering the effect of 'post' on all recipients.
- Represent your profession with integrity and speak out when you witness inappropriate on-line behaviour.

### **Acknowledgements**

The SVT is very grateful to the Society of Radiographers, for use of their resources to create this guidance

### **References & Links to useful information**

<sup>1</sup> DoH (2012) '[Power of Information](#)' strategy.

Society of Radiographers "Guidance for the radiography workforce on the professional use of Social Media " <http://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/somerad-guidance-radiography-workforce-professional-use-social-media>

Royal College of General Practitioners' [Social Media Highway Code](#)

Doctor's use of social media (2013) [http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical\\_guidance/21186.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/21186.asp)

British Medical Association "using social media" <http://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/pdfs/practical%20advice%20at%20work/ethics/socialmediaguidance.pdf>