Safe use of social media

My fellow nurses are worried that their use of social media could cause problems at work. Do you have any advice?

Social media enables health professionals to network widely and is a useful tool. But there are pitfalls and hurdles that need to be navigated when using sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Guidance issued by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) clearly states that nurses who act in an unprofessional or unlawful way on social media put their registration at risk.

This includes posting pictures of patients and people receiving care without their consent, and posting inappropriate comments about patients.

One nurse who posted a selfie with patient details clearly visible in the background was given a written warning that remained on their record for 6 months. Another who used inappropriate language in a tweet to describe a conversation with a patient got a final written warning that was placed on file for a year.

Be cautious

So the golden rule is to be cautious. Don’t make impulsive comments, use unacceptable language or vent your frustration about work, colleagues or patients.

Most employers will have their own guidance on using social media, so as well as breaching the NMC code and putting your registration at risk, you could face disciplinary action from your employer.

Employer organisations may also have specific guidance relating to the use of camera phones at work. Familiarising yourself with this and adhering to it will prevent you getting into trouble.

And remember that your employer – and any future employer – may see your posts or tweets, so always tread carefully to protect your patients and yourself.

‘There are pitfalls and hurdles that need to be navigated’

Zeba Arif

We must strengthen our fight for a safer NHS

On 15 November, up to 10,000 prison officers in England and Wales stopped work in protest against staffing cuts that have caused deterioration of safety in prisons, putting staff and prisoners at risk.

A social movement is now building in the Prison Officers Association, advocating for all members to resign if mandated minimum officer-to-prisoner ratios are not introduced.

A similar situation arose almost 20 years ago in the US. In 1997-98, 7,500 members of the California Nurses Association took on health provider Kaiser Permanente, resigning over unsafe hospital restructuring, cuts to nursing numbers and concerns about patient safety.

In 1999, California became the first US state to introduce mandated minimum nurse-to-patient ratios for all hospital units.

Life has also been tough for nurses in the UK, with staff shortages, a real terms pay cut of 14% since 2010 and the scrapping of the student bursary.

The most worrying development has been the introduction of nursing associates, which unions warn will be used as substitutes for nurses.

The authors of a study involving more than 13,000 nurses have warned that replacing nurses with nursing assistants could put lives at risk.

Like prison officers and the nurses in California, UK nurses must create a social movement and fight for a safe and efficient NHS.

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