



NHS

**Yorkshire
Ambulance Service**
NHS Trust



Social Media Policy

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Staff Summary

Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust (the Trust) appreciates that there are vast benefits to the usage of social media. The Trust encourages these online activities and acknowledges that staff and contractors can improve their personal skills and experience through interactions with others.

However, the Trust has a responsibility to ensure that it protects its patients, employees, public image and reputation. This involves ensuring confidentiality and maintaining security in accordance with established Information Governance policies and good practice.

1.0 Statement of Intent

- 1.1 The four core values that represent our YAS employees' behaviours, views, image and reputation are: Kindness, Respect, Teamwork and Improvement. These core values provide and underpin a foundation and framework for all of YAS decision-making processes. We translate our values into actions. They inspire everything we do. How we operate as a Trust, how we behave in practice and how we implement our processes and policies to meet our strategic outcomes, mission and vision. Non-compliance to live up to our values may be deemed misconduct and referred to the Trust's Code of Conduct Policy and Procedure.
- 1.2 Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust (the Trust) understands the many benefits of using social media as a communications and engagement tool. The Trust encourages these online activities and acknowledges that staff and contractors can improve their personal skills and experience through interactions with others.
- 1.3 However, the Trust has a responsibility to ensure that it protects its patients, employees, maintaining public confidence. This involves ensuring confidentiality and maintaining security in accordance with established Information Governance policies and good practice.
- 1.4 The Trust regularly uses social media as part of its communications strategy. The Corporate Communications team has the authority to speak on behalf of the Trust and is responsible for managing and monitoring the Trust's official channels;
 - @yorksambulance (X, Instagram, YouTube)
 - Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust (Facebook, LinkedIn)
- 1.5 The Trust's official channels will be used to improve the public's understanding of the Trust and its work, promote health, and engage with the general public.
- 1.6 A number of additional accounts have been approved by the Corporate Communications team to be officially associated with the Trust and these are;
 - YAS CFR (Facebook)
 - Yorkshire Ambulance Service Research Institute (LinkedIn)
- 1.7 Associated accounts should not be created without guidance and approval from the Corporate Communications team and associated accounts will be monitored to ensure they represent the Trust appropriately and do not breach the social media policy. The main focus of social media content and activity is on the YAS corporate accounts, rather than the creation of new accounts.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This policy outlines the values and principles of good practice when using social media.
- 2.2 When posting content online, common sense and good judgement should be used in all cases in conjunction with the Code of Conduct.
- 2.3 If employees are in any doubt about social media and what is appropriate or inappropriate, advice should be sought from HR or Corporate Communications, before and not after, content is posted or information is divulged.

3.0 Purpose/Scope

- 3.1 The Trust is committed to maintaining confidentiality and safety at all times of its employees, patients, service users and Trust business.
- 3.2 Patient-information or incidents involving patients, anonymous or not, should always be considered identifiable and should not be shared via social media. Selected 'associated accounts' that post on social media must maintain patient and service user confidentiality at all times in line with guidance in section 4.7.
- 3.3 The Trust holds itself and its staff to high ethical standards and responsible behaviour in line with the Trust Code of Conduct and the standards of conduct defined by any relevant regulatory or professional organisation (e.g. HCPC, GMC, NMC etc.). Staff should follow the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected at work.
- 3.4 The Trust encourages respectful behaviour between staff and will not tolerate offensive comments being made about Trust colleagues or Trust business.
- 3.5 Staff must take care to avoid online content or actions that breach confidentiality are inaccurate, libellous, defamatory, harassing, threatening, or may otherwise be illegal. Such actions will be dealt with via the disciplinary policy.
- 3.6 Inappropriate content posted online can bring the Trust into disrepute. Instances of behaviour which harms the Trust's reputation, or is considered to be offensive, will be dealt with under the disciplinary policy for example, posting or resharing content which could be considered discriminatory in nature, sharing/promoting views which are not in line with the Trust values and behaviours, or sharing views which might cause service users to lack confidence in accessing clinical services.
- 3.7 Employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online and ensuring that they use social media in a sensible manner. Whilst it is recognised that staff use their own personal profiles, they should ensure that any online activity is in line with the Trust values. Staff members should be aware that where they identify YAS as their employer online, or where it is possible to link their social media accounts to YAS as their employer, their opinions may be seen as a reflection of the Trust's position or may impact public confidence in YAS' services.
- 3.8 Employees wishing to make an announcement via the Trust's official social media accounts should contact the Corporate Communications team.
- 3.9 The closed Facebook Group, OneYAS, is a channel that is used by a large number of YAS staff to discuss a wide variety of topics. Any Facebook content or channels must not

undermine or disrupt the operational and business functions of the Trust. All social media content should follow the principles set out in this policy, and follow the good practice set out in section 7 and take account of the personal responsibility set out in section 8. Any clinical posts should align with Trust existing clinical practices and should be used to promote excellent clinical practice across the Trust. This policy covers closed Trust social media groups.

- 3.10 Regardless of the topic, staff must not repost any comments/content on closed internal sites to external social media sites.
- 3.11 If an employee has an issue or concern (grievance), they should discuss this with their line manager or consult the relevant Trust policies. Moderators for these closed sites should ensure that communication is in line with Trust expectations.
- 3.12 If an employee becomes aware that a colleague has accessed/utilised sites which pose harm to children/vulnerable adults, these concerns should be raised immediately through the route outlined in the Managing Safeguarding Allegations Against Staff in a Position of Trust procedure and Safeguarding Policy.

4.0 Staff with authorised access to social media for work purposes

- 4.1 Despite having authorised access to social media for work purposes, all staff members must adhere to all the Purpose in Section 3.0 and the Diversity Statement in Section 5.0.
- 4.2 Selected staff will be permitted to use social media as part of their daily work and post from an associated account on behalf of the Trust as part of a scheme run by Corporate Communications.
- 4.3 No staff member will be able to post using an associated account until they have met with a communications team member and had an introduction to the relevant social media channel, how and when to use an associated account, and also gone through the dos and don'ts of using an associated account.
- 4.4 At no time will using social media be allowed to take priority for the staff member; their treatment of patients and the 'day' job will always come first.
- 4.5 All usernames and passwords will be held by Corporate Communications and the staff member's posts can be accessed, edited and even deleted at Corporate Communications discretion.
- 4.6 'Associated accounts' must adhere to the style guide provided by Corporate Communications.
- 4.7 Whilst selected 'associated accounts' are encouraged to post about their work, staff must maintain patient and service user confidentiality at all times. The following is considered patient identifiable information and should not be disclosed:
 - Patient's name, address, full postcode or date of birth
 - Pictures, photographs, videos, audio-tapes or other images of patients
 - NHS number and local patient identifiable codes
 - Anything else that may be used to identify a patient directly or indirectly. (For example, photograph of house in street, rare diseases, cars, drug treatments or statistical analyses which have very small numbers within a small population may allow individuals to be identified.)

- 4.8 Any patient who wishes to be identified, should be directed to the Corporate Communications team.
- 4.9 Corporate Communications alongside HR can and will revoke staff access to official channels at their own discretion.

5.0 Diversity Statement

- 5.1 Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust encourages an inclusive culture and values diversity. The Trust is committed to tackling all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination and fostering good relations on the grounds of “protected characteristics”. Those protected characteristics are age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief.
- 5.2 As part of this commitment the Trust endeavours to ensure that no employee, or prospective employee, is discriminated against, either directly or indirectly. This includes through the use of social media.
- 5.3 Many YAS employees make use of social media in a professional and personal capacity. While employees may not always think that they are acting on behalf of the Trust or in their capacity as a YAS employee, employees must be aware that they can be recognised as being a YAS employee.
- 5.4 Any communications through or engagement by employees with social media, whether in a professional or personal capacity must not do anything that could be considered discriminatory or convey views or opinions that are contrary to the Trust commitment to diversity. The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples:
- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to protected characteristics or
 - Posting/ liking or sharing images or content that are discriminatory or offensive (including references to organisations that may convey discriminatory views) or
 - Publishing any material or comments that could undermine public confidence in the Trust and its employees or
 - Posting or sharing links to such content
- 5.5 The Trust [inclusive language guidance](#) will be followed to ensure language used is inclusive.
- 5.6 Trust social media accounts will be accessible, including the use of alternative text for images and videos and follow the [government](#) and [NHS guidance](#) on accessibility requirements, as well as guidance from other organisations (e.g. [Royal National Institute for the Blind](#)).

6.0 Good Practice on Social Media

- 6.1 If you disclose your affiliation with the Trust on your profile or in any social media postings, you must state that your views do not represent those of the Trust (unless you are authorised via an authorised account to represent a section of the Trust).
- 6.2 Be mindful of others when posting on social media and recognise personal responsibility for posts, (see section 7.0 below).
- 6.3 Write in the first person, do not speak as a representative of the Trust.

6.4 Remain professional on social media and refrain from posting something if you are unsure of how this could be interpreted.

6.5 Inform the Corporate Communications team of any breaches of this policy.

7.0 Personal Responsibilities

7.1 All employees who choose to use social media either in a corporate or personal capacity are solely responsible for what is posted on their accounts.

7.2 Therefore, employees must also face the consequences of posting contrary to the advice included in this social media policy. This includes potential disciplinary action, even when posting as a personal opinion.

7.3 In the most serious circumstances this may include civil or criminal legal action. This may include, but is not limited to, if the individual posts libellous or defamatory information online ([Defamation Act 2013](#)), incites others to commit a crime ([Malicious Communications Act 1988](#)), illegally uses copyrighted material ([Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988](#)), or is in [contempt of court](#) by commenting on an active court case ([Contempt of Court Act 1981](#)).

7.4 The requirements of the [Data Protection Act 2018](#), [General Data Protection Regulation 2016](#) and the [Caldicott Principles 2013](#) must be adhered to at all times.

7.5 Registered clinicians are advised that they may put their registration at risk if they post inappropriate information on social networking sites. Individuals should check their own professional code of conduct for any specific social media guidance and restrictions.

8.0 Implementation Plan

8.1 This policy will be reviewed in three years' time unless legislative or other changes necessitate an earlier review.

8.2 The latest approved version of this document will be posted on the Trust Intranet site for all members of staff to view. New members of staff will be signposted to how to find and access this guidance during Trust Induction.

8.3 This policy will be communicated via internal communications channels, including:

- Staff Update
- Locality meetings
- Trust intranet, Pulse
- Teambrief

9.0 Monitoring compliance with this Policy

9.1 Social media sites are periodically checked for content concerning YAS and any incidents that are deemed to breach this policy will be dealt with under the appropriate procedure.

10.0 References

10.1 This policy is based on the NHS best practice guidelines and guidance from:

- Association of Ambulance Chief Executives, '[Best practice guidance for ambulance service corporate tweeters on the use of social media/media related to patients](#)'
- The College of Paramedics, [Social Media Guidance \(collegeofparamedics.co.uk\)](#),
- The Health and Care Professions Council ,(HCPC) [Communication and using social media | \(hcpc-uk.org\)](#).
- The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) [Social media guidance - The Nursing and Midwifery Council \(nmc.org.uk\)](#),
- NHS England [social-media-policy.pdf \(england.nhs.uk\)](#),
- The British Medical Association (BMA), [Ethics of social media use for doctors \(bma.org.uk\)](#),
- The General Medical Council (GMC), [Doctors use of social media - ethical guidance summary - GMC \(gmc-uk.org\)](#)