

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release: Monday, 21 September 2009

TAKE CARE WHEN USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES – WARNS MDDUS

Doctors must take care when using social networking websites such as Facebook, Bebo and Twitter to avoid damaging their careers, warns the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland (MDDUS).

This was highlighted earlier this month when A&E staff at a hospital in Swindon were suspended after posting photographs on Facebook of doctors and nurses playing the "Lying Down Game".

The sites are a global phenomenon with hundreds of millions of people hooked on sharing intimate details of their lives. But problems can arise when medical professionals decide to spell out exactly how they feel about their boss, workmates or their patients.

With so many users, the key thing to remember is that it is unlikely that any "private" messages posted on line will stay that way for long and may well end up in the public domain.

"The two biggest mistakes young doctors risk making when on social networking sites are breaching patient confidentiality and bringing the profession into disrepute," says Dr Anthea Martin, senior medical adviser with the UK-wide MDDUS.

"Both could attract the attention of the GMC, which has the power to launch an investigation, suspend the doctor involved and – in the most extreme cases – remove them from the register.

"Doctors must be scrupulously careful with their internet postings as providing information about patients, even if you do not name them, can still breach confidentiality.

"And making derogatory or discriminatory comments about colleagues will fall foul of GMC guidelines that doctors must not make malicious or unfounded criticisms that may undermine patients' trust in the profession."

Dr Martin adds: "Doctors must take care and be aware of the potential risks when using social networking sites. The simple advice is don't use them in any way in which your professionalism as a doctor can be called into question."

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For further information contact Colin Calder on 0141 616 2677 or 07850 510881.

Note to editors

MDDUS is a medical defence organisation providing access to professional indemnity and expert medicolegal advice for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals throughout the UK. For further information on MDDUS go to www.mddus.com.