



# Social Media Policy

Title:	<b>Social Media Policy</b>		
Reference Number:	NIAS/CS/GP/01/2013		
Purpose of Policy:	This policy is intended to provide advice and guidance on the NIAS's Corporate use of social media sites and applications. In addition, it outlines employee responsibilities when using social media sites both in a personal and work related capacity. It is intended to ensure that NIAS is not exposed to legal risks; its reputation is not adversely affected and that service users can clearly distinguish the views of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and individual/personal views.		
Directorate Responsible for Policy:	Human Resources and Corporate Services Directorate		
Original Author(s):	Fionnuala Hoy, Senior HR Officer John McPoland, Communications Officer		
Staff Side Consultation	Yes (via meeting on 13 <sup>th</sup> March 2013)		
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## Circulation list:

This document was circulated to the following groups for consultation:

- UNISON, UNITE, NIPSA, GMB

Following approval, this Policy document was circulated to the following staff and groups of staff:

- All Trust staff
- Trust Internet / Intranet Site



## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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## **SECTION ONE:**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The widespread availability and use of social media sites and applications brings new opportunities for NIAS to understand, engage and communicate with our users in new ways. It is vital that these services should be used effectively and that NIAS can balance the use of social media sites and applications with its duty to patients, relatives and carers, its legal responsibility and its reputation.

The use of online social media sites and applications such as, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube etc has become a very significant part of life for many people. These sites provide a very positive way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests, both personal and work related.

NIAS is aware that these sites can become a negative forum for complaining or gossiping and care must be taken not to breach NIAS policies and procedures or cause offence when using these services.

In developing this Policy NIAS has considered its duties under the following legislation:-

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Computer Misuse Act
- Employment / Equality and Human Rights legislation
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

### **1.2 Purpose of the Social Media Policy**

The purpose of this Policy is: -

- To provide advice and guidance on NIAS's responsibilities on the use of corporate social media sites;
- To provide advice and guidance to employees on the use of social media sites, both personal and work related, e.g. Trust sites; other Ambulance Services sites; NHS sites; etc.
- To ensure that employees are aware of their responsibilities when utilising social media sites/applications, both personal and work related;
- To clarify how use of media sites/applications on a personal level can be linked to employment and the implications that brings;
- To ensure that users can clearly distinguish where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of NIAS;
- To ensure the reputation of NIAS is not adversely affected by use of social media sites by users.



### 1.3 Scope

The Policy covers the use of social media sites and applications by NIAS for corporate communication purposes as well as the use of social media sites and applications by NIAS employees. In addition, the Policy applies whether or not an employee is using Trust equipment for accessing such media sites/applications.

Social media applications and sites include, but are not limited to, blogs, online discussion forums, media sharing services and the widely used Facebook and Twitter. The internet involves fast moving technologies and it is impossible to cover all sites/applications or scenarios. The absence of, or lack of, explicit reference to a specific website or social media application does not limit the extent of the application of this policy.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with other NIAS Policies & Procedures such as:-

- Use of the Internet
- Use of Email
- NIAS Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Harassment Procedure
- Whistle blowing Procedure

### 1.4 Principles

The intention of this Policy is not to prevent NIAS or its employees from conducting legitimate activities on social media site/applications but to highlight the areas where difficulties can arise for both employees and NIAS when links to employment may be established in the use of social media: -

- 1.4.1 Employees should be mindful of the content of their social media, either personal or work related, where links to employment may be established e.g. employees who have named NIAS as their employer, where reference to their employment/employer is made etc.
- 1.4.2 Employees should be mindful of their responsibilities under their Contract of Employment, including their Code of Conduct, which staff should refer to in terms of Social Media.
- 1.4.3 Employees should not engage in activities which may bring NIAS into disrepute.
- 1.4.4 All employees are reminded of the need to maintain patient, colleague, employment and NIAS confidentiality at all times.
- 1.4.5 Social media sites/applications should not be used for accessing or sharing illegal content.
- 1.4.6 Social media should not be used to abuse, harass or bully.



- 1.4.7 Personal details or information disclosed on social media sites could be stolen. Employees should be aware of the potential of identity theft occurring and take appropriate precautions to prevent this.

NIAS does not discourage employees from using social media sites and application. However all staff should be aware that any breaches of this policy may be regarded as misconduct or gross misconduct under the NIAS Disciplinary Procedure.

## **1.5 Codes of Practice**

Professional bodies may have issued their own code of practice relating to the use of social media. Staff have a personal responsibility to be aware of codes of practice relating to their professional body, however NIAS policy remains the definitive guidance for staff in the use of social media as an employee of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

## **1.6 Roles and Responsibilities**

To minimise the risks inherent in using social media, to avoid loss of productivity and to ensure that IT resources and communications systems are used only for appropriate business purposes, we expect all staff to adhere to this policy.

'Staff' relates to everyone on a NIAS contract, including those on temporary, student, honorary contracts as well as Agency Staff.

All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media should be reported to your line manager.

Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to: the Human Resources Department.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **2.1 NIAS' Corporate Social Media**

The Media and Communications Manager is responsible for managing and monitoring the Trust's current and future Social Media sites on behalf of the NIAS. The management of those sites includes the posting of information on behalf of NIAS. This responsibility may be extended to other authorised personnel identified by NIAS to ensure consistency of management and monitoring.



- 2.1.1 The Media and Communications Manager will, on behalf of NIAS, monitor comments, feedback and messages posted on NIAS's sites Monday to Friday (9am-5pm)<sup>1</sup> and reserves the right to:
- Remove inappropriate comments.
  - Ban users from the site.
  - Report users to Line Managers, as appropriate.
- 2.1.2 In line with Data Protection legislation, NIAS will seek to ensure that personal data relating to patients or service users will not be included on any site except where consent has been given for inclusion of the following:
- Photograph.
  - Moving image.
  - Name.
- 2.1.3 In respect of NIAS staff, the Trust undertakes to make the subject(s) of any photograph or video footage aware of the reasonable expectation of the Trust that any such media may then be posted on current, or future, Corporate Social Media Sites including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In appropriate circumstances, following representation by the subjects, the Trust will consider requests not to display certain media images.
- 2.1.4 The Media and Communications Manager will, on behalf of NIAS, further ensure that it's Social Media sites;
- Are appropriately updated and not used in such a way as to be considered as impacting negatively, on core business.
  - Are respectful towards, patient, public and staff.
  - Do not reveal confidential or sensitive information about patients, staff or the service.
  - Are updated on a regular basis and that user posts or queries are responded to in a timely manner.
  - Are kept free of content posted by others that could be considered offensive or derogatory.

Monitoring reports, reflecting comments, feedback and themes posted, along with messages and queries received on NIAS social media sites will be submitted on a regular basis for consideration by the NIAS's Senior Executive Management Team.

Access to social media sites is not normally permitted on Service computers. However those staff who are authorised to access sites may do so only for appropriate purposes approved by NIAS.

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<sup>1</sup> NIAS will not be responsible for comments posted by visitors to the site outside the monitoring period indicated above. NIAS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any inappropriate comments that may be posted during this time are managed appropriately.



Staff authorised as site administrators to access these sites must use them in an ethical and lawful manner, considering issues such as patient confidentiality, data protection and NIAS reputation.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **3.1 Personal Use of Social Media**

Outside of the working environment, whether or not an individual chooses to create or participate in an online social network or any other form of online publishing or discussion, is his or her own business.

However, as a NIAS employee it is important to be aware that posting information or views about NIAS cannot be isolated from your working life. Inappropriate comments about the Trust, patients, clients or colleagues can bring the NIAS into disrepute and make both NIAS and the employee liable to legal action. Additionally, incidents may be treated as misconduct and, in some cases, gross misconduct. Staff should therefore keep their personal use of social media as separate as possible from their professional life. NIAS would therefore recommend that staff members do not identify NIAS as their employer in their personal social media profiles. However, should they wish to do so, NIAS recommends they clearly identify that any comments, views or expressions are wholly personal and are in no way reflective of those of his/her employing body.

The following policy statements are designed to protect NIAS and the employee from risk of allegation, disrepute and liability and are not exhaustive.

### **3.2 Staff should never do any of the following:**

- 3.2.1 Share confidential work related information on personal social media networks.
- 3.2.2 Employees should never post media on their personal social media sites/applications of HSC Trust patients and/or relatives.
- 3.2.3 Post inappropriate comments about a staff member, patient or client. This includes discussion of work-related issues, conversations about patients and complaints about colleagues.
- 3.2.4 Use social media sites to bully or intimidate.
- 3.2.5 Use social media in any way which is unlawful.
- 3.2.6 Use offensive, sexist, sectarian, racist, hateful or otherwise offensive or discriminatory language which would be considered to be contrary to any NIAS policies and procedures, eg Harassment Policy etc.
- 3.2.7 Post media on personal social media sites/applications of other NIAS employees taken in a work situation and/or in NIAS uniform, without informed consent.
- 3.2.8 Post media on their personal social media sites/applications of Trust equipment or vehicles.



- 3.2.9 Use or display the NIAS corporate logo on any personal social media site/application unless formal approval is provided by NIAS.
- 3.2.10 Publish your NIAS email address on a personal social media site, or use this address as part of your login / registration on a personal site.
- 3.2.11 Use Trust networks or equipment to access or update a personal social media site.

The above statements refer to the posting of all types of content on social media sites, including (but not exclusively) text, photographs and video.

### **3.3 NIAS Recommends:**

- 3.3.1 We recognise that Northern Ireland is a small place, and often we will provide health or social care to people who we are acquainted with; these people may also be 'friends' on sites like Facebook.  
It is advised that if you do receive a friends request from a patient or client (or their family member) who was previously unknown to you and who you only know through your professional work, you should not accept this request. Any patient / client or their family member, who you only know through your professional work, who is currently an online friend, should be deleted from your friends list. In order to minimise any potential risks to employees, such links to patients may be considered as inappropriate and consequently could be treated as misconduct.
- 3.3.2 Permission should be sought from colleagues before posting any media or information on personal social media sites or applications. An individual should consider colleague's request for information or media to be removed from such a site or application.
- 3.3.3 Ensure that personal blogs have clear disclaimers that the views expressed by the author are theirs alone and do not represent the views of NIAS. Make your writing clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of NIAS.
- 3.3.4 Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time therefore protect your privacy and take care to understand a site's terms and conditions of use. While access to social media sites through the NIAS network are blocked to most employees, accessing the internet through personal smart phones and other mobile devices is on the increase. Therefore do not let your use of social media interfere with your job and always access these sites in your own time.

## **SECTION FOUR**

### **4.1 Further Guidance for the Use of Social Media Professional Forums**

Your relationship with social media changes as soon as you identify yourself as an employee of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, speak in any kind of professional capacity or seek to deploy social media on NIAS business.





In such circumstances there are responsibilities, standards of behaviour and other organisational considerations which apply. Remember, you are publicly identified as a NIAS employee and should participate in the same way as you would with other media, public meeting or forum.

Always remember that participation online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being published in other media.

You should also be aware that you may attract media interest in yourself or the organisation, so proceed with care. If you have any doubts, take advice from your line manager, who may in turn contact NIAS's Media and Communications Manager if required.

Professional use of Social Media is defined as participation in third party professional forums and/or discussion boards relating to your work.

The following policy statements relate to professional use of social media:

4.1.1 Staff are free to participate in professional forums relating to their area of work whilst being mindful of the codes of conduct required of them in a professional capacity as well as an employee of NIAS.

4.1.2 When participating in a professional capacity staff **must**:

- i. Seek approval from your line manager before participating, or declare any existing interests.
- ii. Clearly identify yourself as an employee of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, and state your role.
- iii. Only provide information about your work location if it is absolutely essential.
- iv. Be professional – make sure you are always seen to act in an honest, accurate, fair and responsible way at all times.
- v. Obtain written permission to publish any information, report or conversation that is not already in the public domain. Do not cite or reference colleagues, partners or suppliers without their written approval.
- vi. Respect copyright when linking to images or other online material.

4.1.3 When participating in a professional capacity staff **must not**:

- i. Mention **any** information relating specifically to an individual patient or client.
- ii. Use offensive, sexist, sectarian, racist, hateful or otherwise offensive or discriminatory language which would be considered to be contrary to any NIAS policies and procedures, eg Harassment Policy etc.
- iii. Endorse or appear to endorse any commercial product or service.



**4.2 Non-Compliance**

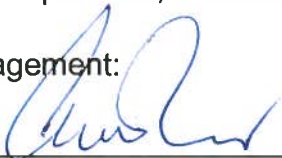
Breach of this policy may be considered misconduct or gross misconduct and so may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether or not Trust equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach.

Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with our investigation. This may include removing internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach in this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

Serious breaches may be reported to the PSNI, ICO or other public authority for further investigation.

**Review**

This policy is effective from <date> 2013 and the effectiveness of the policy shall be reviewed after 6 months of operation, in consultation Trade Union Representatives.

Signed on Behalf of Management: 

Date: 15-4-2013

Document Reference:	Document title:
Authorisation date:	Document type;
Review date:	Responsible authority
Signed off by	