Using Social Media and Mobile Technologies and Maintaining the Dignity and Privacy of Individuals

Awareness note for staff working in the NHS in Wales

Introduction:

This awareness note '*Using Social Media and Mobile Technologies and Maintaining the Dignity and Privacy of Individuals'* provides some background information on the effect of appropriate and inappropriate use of these technologies, it has been produced to assist NHS Wales organisations with the development of local policies and procedures and is intended to complement existing local arrangements.

Context:

Organisations in NHS Wales adhere to national policies and procedures and develop local versions, both of which protect individuals who receive care and those that provide it, respecting dignity and privacy is integral to this approach.

It is accepted that the use of social networking sites, and the use of mobile phones, as a means of communication is a core component of modern social behaviour.

Appropriate use of social media:

Social media or content created and exchanged within virtual communities, through the use of online tools, to turn communication into interactive dialogue has the potential to help the NHS communicate with staff, patients and service users. Social Media can accelerate knowledge acquisition and dissemination and can be used to assist patients and clients to make healthy choices and manage their chronic conditions.

Inappropriate use of Social Media:

The ease of use, functionality and immediacy of social media and mobile phone technologies can lead, either by accident or design, to information that can be attributed to an individual's organisation (including other members of staff) and / or patients and clients being recorded and / or revealed inappropriately where it should not.

The consequence of inappropriate disclosure of Personally Identifiable Information:

It is important to recognise that there are legal and professional implications associated with inappropriate sharing of Personally Identifiable Information (PII), through using social media and mobile technologies. In order to protect staff, patients / clients and service users, and organisations the introduction of suitable guidance and local policies is required.

Local policies and procedures on the acceptable use of social media should include:

- Information about dignity and privacy policies;
- Raising awareness of the positive and negative effects of the use of social media through staff training;
- Clear statements on staff and patient use of social media, cameras (still or moving images)and mobile phones (*all relevant functionality of mobile devices needs to be considered, including phone, text, camera, video and voice / sound recording);*
- Staff guidance on reporting incidents where the inappropriate use of social media has been noted;
- Management of appropriate authorisation processes; and
- Arrangements for quality assuring and monitoring media content.

Staff should be reminded about the:

- Potential impact on professional and personal reputation if information is shared inappropriately;
- The requirement to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of information acquired through their employment status; and
- The disciplinary implications of improper conduct.

The consequence of unauthorised disclosure of information has potentially serious implications, including breaking the law, abuse of professional status and not adhering to contracts of employment. Professional bodies have produced advice and guidance on the subject of social networking and some useful links to this information have been provided.

http://www.nmc-uk.org/Nurses-and-midwives/Advice-by-topic/A/Advice/Social-networking-sites/

http://www.rcn.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/281230/003564.pdf

http://www.bma.org.uk/images/socialmediaguidancemay2011_tcm41-206859.pdf

http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/About/SocialMedia

http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3375