

Social media: friend or foe?



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The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others are part of our everyday lives. Used well they can help to connect with friends, family and colleagues, but misuse is common with many reporting being 'trolled' online that can lead to anxiety, depression or worse. Speaking from my own perspective I can say that overall I've had positive experience but that has required careful consideration of how I use the various platforms. My own approach has been to keep Facebook as a more social environment and use Twitter to build more of an academic community. I'm not suggesting that is necessarily what everyone needs to do but it has meant I've been able to separate personal and professional life. I also avoid entering in unnecessary debates or disagreements, unless there is a need to, for example to address misinformation or disinformation.

Why do I mention this? I came across a Tweet from the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD, 2022a), retweeted from an article from the Telegraph from the 3 August (Pinkstone, 2022), urging people to avoid judging 'people with marks on their skin'. This was in response to a spate of social media posts sharing photos of individuals who were alleged to have monkey pox. The photos were being shared without peoples' knowledge, often went viral, and understandably lead to feelings of humiliation and shame. As a consequence of the increase in this harmful social media activity the BAD (2022b) issued a statement which included:


"It's simple: don't take pictures of people with visible skin conditions in public, don't speculate about their health, and don't contribute to the stigma around monkeypox specifically and rashes more generally."

This led me to question what I would do if I did come across posts on social media like this. There are a number of choices to make such as; not liking the post, unfollowing the account from which the post arose, mute/block the account and also reporting the post. So we all have choices to make when we find unkind, harmful and derogatory

responses. If we work in health care then we all have a relevant code of conduct to follow. All of the main healthcare professional councils have issued guidance on social media so it's well worth referring to the applicable code to familiarise yourself with the recommendations:

- ▶ Social Media Guidance, Nursing & Midwifery Council (2022): <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/guidance/social-media-guidance/>
- ▶ Doctors use of social media, General Medical Council (2013): <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/doctors-use-of-social-media>
- ▶ Communication and using social media: Health & Care Professions Council (2021): <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/meeting-our-standards/communication-and-using-social-media/>

In terms of working with individuals with wounds I think we can learn a lot from this. Wounds can not always be hidden and we know from our own experiences that many individuals fear going out because it risks their wound (scar, skin condition) being noticed and commented upon. There is a lot we can do to help individuals try and live the life they seek, so speaking out and up when we see discrimination or ignorance in play is fundamental. Referring to the NMC guidance on use of social media a guiding principle to remember is:

"Do not post anything on social media that may be viewed as discriminatory, does not recognise individual choice or does not preserve the dignity of those receiving care" (NMC, 2022). 

REFERENCE

- British Association of Dermatologists (2022a) <https://tinyurl.com/3x6zte2e4> (accessed 18 August 2022)
- British Association of Dermatologists (2022b) Statement on sharing so-called 'monkeypox' pictures online. <https://www.bad.org.uk/statement-on-sharing-so-called-monkeypox-pictures-online/> (accessed 18 August 2022)
- National Medical Council (2022) Social Media Guidance, Nursing & Midwifery Council (2022) <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/guidance/social-media-guidance/> (accessed 18 August 2022)
- Pinkstone J (2022) Monkeypox stigma warning: Don't judge people with marks on their skin says doctor. <https://tinyurl.com/349fk7y2> (accessed 18 August 2022)