



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Internal Memorandum

To: Each Manager, Supervisor, and Staff Member
c.c.: NAS Leadership Team
From: Robert Morton, Director, National Ambulance Service
Date: 16th August, 2012
Subject: **USE OF SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

Colleagues,

Everyone is entitled to explore and engage in social media communities in a personal capacity. Many social media sites allow you to register personal information like details of your employer. If you choose to identify yourself as a HSE employee on social media profiles, or in your commentary on social media sites, it is important to stop and think about the nature of your comments, the public perception and nature of social media and their possible consequences, both for you and your employer. The internet constitutes a permanent record, even if you attempt to delete or anonymise your comments

Misuse or abuse of social and digital media can cause significant injury and offence to third parties and can also impact negatively on the credibility of the National Ambulance Service, the professional reputation of the vast majority of our staff whom behave professionally and the confidence and trust of the public in the services we provide.

The HSE is potentially vicariously liable for injury caused by misuse or abuse of social and digital media channels by its employees. Consequently the HSE takes any misuse or abuse of social and digital media by HSE employees very seriously and can lead to significant disciplinary and legal actions.

The HSE Code of Standards and Behaviour contains an implied term of mutual trust and confidence between employer and employee in all employment contracts. A very negative, defamatory or damaging posting or communication by an employee may entitle the employer to proceed with the HSE Disciplinary Process, including investigation, and discipline up to dismissal if warranted. If defamatory material is posted on a social networking site, defamation claims may arise against the employee. Employees must not improperly disclose, during or following termination of employment, information gained in the course of their work.

Seirbhís Náisiúnta Otharchair
Teach Dara, Ascaill an Crann Teile, Páirc na Mílaoise, Nás na Rí, Co. Chill Dara

National Ambulance Service
Oak House, Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare
Tel: 045 882592 Fax: 1890 252 125

All staff are expected to comply with the Code of Standards and Behaviour at all times. Breaches of the code constitute a breach of the terms of employment and may result in disciplinary action being pursued in accordance with agreed procedures. Like all employee policies, it is the responsibility of local NAS Line Managers to address any issues that arise in relation to breach of these policies and regulations. There is also a significant personal responsibility placed on each staff member. In this regard, the Guidelines set out as Appendix I will be helpful

It has become necessary to acknowledge that a very small minority of NAS staff continue to post unprofessional, disparaging and derogatory comments about their employer and by association, the vast majority of professional staff within all grades whom work tirelessly to promote the wellbeing of our patients and safety of the services we provide. This unprofessional use of social media, by those whom clearly identify themselves both personally and as HSE employees are now well known and a matter of record. Such conduct is wholly unacceptable to NAS, the professionals whom manage and deliver our services, the recognised trade unions whom represent the professional interests of their members or indeed the public whom rely on us in times of great need. Line Managers will now be directed to address such behaviour and consider same prior to issuing any recommendation on the conduct of any staff member seeking any opportunity within the National Ambulance Service.

In the near future, the National Ambulance Service intends to commence use of an official National Ambulance Service Facebook Page. It's purpose will be to:

1. Promote the wellbeing of the public in emergency situations
2. Highlight key pre hospital emergency care issues relating to research, education or service development
3. Provide a platform to communicate key messages to the social media community
4. Provide an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the professionalism displayed by our staff everyday
5. Highlight key successes in improving service delivery to our patients
6. Promote public confidence in NAS services and the professionalism of our staff in all grades and functions
7. Keep all NAS personnel informed about changes occurring or to come

Once established, all NAS staff are encouraged to contribute to it's content and ultimate success.

Yours sincerely



Robert Morton
Director
National Ambulance Service

Note:

Any queries regarding the contents of this internal memorandum should be directed through your immediate Line Supervisor/Line Manager in the first instance.

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Guidelines on Use of Social and Digital Media

It is considered good practice to approach the online world in the same way we do the physical one, we should not do or say anything in the online world that we would not do in the physical one. It is important that all staff are aware of the implications of engaging in social media and online conversations that reference the HSE or your association with the HSE.

If you speak online while identified as a HSE employee, but in a personal capacity, in some contexts the HSE may be seen as having endorsed the comments that you may make.

In addition, as a healthcare professional or a person working within the health system, people with whom you converse online may take health related decisions based on your comments – so there is a particular responsibility on you to think carefully before you post.

If engaging in personal social media while identified as a HSE employee:

1. All HSE employees are public servants. Our role and our work is to serve the public and ensure that health and personal social services are delivered to the best possible standards. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures; how you conduct yourself in the online social media space not only reflects on you – it is a direct reflection on your employer.
2. Think before you post. Then, think again. Anything you post that is inaccurate, unfair, or breaking patient privacy standards will ultimately be your responsibility. We encourage you to participate in the online social media space, but urge you to do so responsibly, exercising sound judgment and common sense.
3. Let the experts respond to negative posts. You may come across negative posts about the HSE, but should avoid the temptation to react yourself - pass the post(s) along to the Communications Directorate, whose staff are authorised to respond to comments on behalf of the HSE.
4. Be cautious when mixing your business and personal lives. Online, your personal and business profiles are likely to intersect. The HSE respects the privacy of all employees, but you must remember that clients and colleagues may have access to the online content you post. Keep this in mind when publishing information online that can be seen by more than friends and family, and know that information originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on very easily.
5. Know that the Internet is permanent. Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if you “remove/delete” it later or attempt to make it anonymous.

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