

## **BAPO Social Media Policy**

The use of Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, etc) is now widespread. Therefore BAPO Members must understand that their personal and professional conduct when using social media should be of an appropriate standard as to not put themselves at risk of any accusations of misconduct or inappropriate behaviour that may lead to action being taken against them. Members should consider that the general principles stated in ***BAPO Ethical and Professional Conduct for Prosthetists and Orthotists*** apply as well as the guidelines set out in this document and both documents should be read in conjunction with each other. All Members should abide by these guidelines as failure to do so will put a member's membership at risk:

- Members must maintain strict confidentiality in accordance with the *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)(Regulation (EU) 2016/679)* and with the; *BAPO Ethical and Professional Conduct for Prosthetists and Orthotists*
- Members must never post any personal information about any patient/client or colleague unless they have proof of their consent to do so
- Members must never post any comments that could be considered defamatory
- Members must maintain conservative privacy settings and be aware that information they post online may be read by anyone and also remain available to view for a long period of time
- Members should not accept friend requests from any current or former patients/clients
- Members should be conscious of their online image and how it may impact on their professional position and that of their profession as a whole
- Members must fully understand that Social media can blur the boundary between personal and professional life and that comments made on a personal level may also reflect on them professionally
- Member's online discussions, posts, comments and behaviour must be of an appropriate professional level

### **Confidentiality:**

Social media, can provide Members with an opportunity in which they can discuss their experiences within their own clinical practice. However it may be possible that any material published, uploaded or posted could become and remain available in the public domain. It is therefore important that Members exercise extreme caution when discussing any specific cases. Members have a legal and ethical duty to protect patient/client confidentiality as stated in the ***Confidentiality Section of the BAPO Ethical and Professional Conduct for Prosthetists and Orthotists***. Any member disclosing information about a patient/client without proof of their consent will be considered as a breach of their duty.

### **Appropriateness:**

Discussions about patient/clients and clinical practice with colleagues can have professional and educational benefits. Members should avoid specific informal discussions about patients/clients. It would be considered inappropriate for Members to make any personal derogatory comments or false statements about a current/past or future patient/client or colleague. Even anonymous comments about any specific patient/client or colleague will be considered as a breach of confidentiality and an act of unprofessional conduct that will put a member's membership at risk. Members should be aware that it is possible that anonymous postings can be traced.

Members must take into consideration how their posts will reflect on themselves as professionals and how this may influence or affect the public's trust in the profession as a whole.

**Defamation:**

*“False written (Libel) or spoken (Slander) information/communication that is made either in public or in private that intentionally causes harm to a person's reputation; has a negative impact on them and reduces the regard or respect in which the person is held; or causes the person to become the subject of ridicule, hatred or induces derogatory, hostile, or disagreeable opinions against the person to which the initial information/communication relates to.”*

Defamation may be a criminal or civil offense. Members must never post any comments or upload any information that may be considered defamatory. This applies to all comments uploaded or posted whether they are made in a personal or professional capacity and regardless if they are made in private or on a public platform.

The act of making an unjustified statement about an individual and/or an organisation that is considered defamatory could lead to action taken against and also put a Members Membership at risk.

**A general rule would be:**

*“Even if you stop for a moment to ask yourself is this appropriate to post? Then do not post it.”*

**Privacy and Personal Information:**

The use of social media can blur the boundary between private and professional lives. Members must be aware that personal material they post about themselves or share with friends can possibly be accessible to a wider audience and that once posted it may be difficult to prevent it from being widely shared. Personal information about themselves may be accessible by patients/clients and this may cause problems with patient/client relationships.

It is therefore important that members should ensure that they review their privacy settings and restrict their public personal information. They should keep personal information to a minimum and keep it professional.

**Friend Requests:**

Relationships between Members and their patients/clients should remain on a professional level and based around their clinical care. It is important to maintain this professional boundary to maintain trust between Members and their patients/clients and reduce the risk of any exploitation by either party. Therefore Members who receive friend requests from current or former patients should not accept these requests and politely refuse them explaining that professionally it would be inappropriate for them to accept a Friend invite.

**Conflicts of interest:**

Members should declare any potential conflict of interest when endorsing a product on line. This duty applies even where Members may anonymously post material. Failure to declare any conflicts of interests could affect public trust and compromise the Members professional status.

**Social Media and Professionalism:**

Members should always maintain a professional manner when posting comments or uploading material regardless if this is in a professional or personal capacity and understand that when they make a comment it will have potential to impact of their professional standing. They must take into consideration whether anything they upload or post could compromise public trust or undermine confidence on their profession.

**Professional Networking**

Professional Networking via platforms such as LinkedIn and others which may be open to the public or restricted to professionals of certain disciplines are also covered by this Social Media policy.

However, it is widely accepted that the use of professional networks and forums can provide educational and professional benefits and easily bring together individuals and allow them to discuss their experiences and clinical practices where previously this was not possible.

Members must however exercise caution when actively engaging with professional networks and ensure that they abide by this Social Media Policy. Members should act in a professional manner at all times and restrict personal information that they post about themselves. They must maintain strict confidentiality with regards to any current or previous patients/clients. Members must never post any comments that could be considered defamatory and always declare any conflict of interest.