



NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL MEDIA MINEFIELD

A recent twitter chat hosted by @AfNutr* highlighted how social media can be a fantastic way to share evidence-based nutrition and lifestyle messages with an extremely large audience. However, for nutrition and health professionals it can also be a potential minefield.

Following six simple rules can help to prevent an inappropriate tweet or Instagram post damaging your own and the professions' reputation, and the risk of you being subject to a fitness to practise complaint.

1. Always be polite and respectful
2. Reflect the balance of scientific evidence
3. Be accurate and objective
4. Do not be influenced by financial reward
5. Always declare any links to organisations or products reviewing/promoting/critiquing
6. Comply with relevant rules and regulations (ASA/CAP, CMA, nutrition & health claims, AfN, HCPC, etc.)

Done right, social media is a wonderful tool and some of the best features is the wide reach and extremely low cost, making it a viable

resource for so many. Just remember that social media is just that – social. So do have a conversation with people and don't just push out information without conversing.

We know from science communications research that whilst repeating the same message does result in some awareness and that consistency is important, if it is done in a static manner it does not engage the majority into actually taking action or create behaviour change. With so much content just a click away, individuals want their social media content to be instantly relatable. The most successful posts often being those which result in the reader being motivated, excited or impassioned.

The Science Media Centre was once quoted as saying: "Journalists will start doing science better, when scientists start doing media better." The same is true for social media and the criticism of the amount of misinformation that gains significant traction. It could therefore be said that *social media will do nutrition better, when nutrition professionals start doing social media better.* A challenge I know as Registered Nutritionists and Dietitians you are up to – just remember to follow the six simple rules when doing so.

Regulations to be aware of, especially if working with companies or promoting one's own services:

- Marketers and their communications **must not** discourage essential treatment for conditions for which medical supervision should be sought (CAP 12.1)
- Marketers and their communications **must not** confuse consumers by using unfamiliar scientific words for common conditions (CAP 12.4)
- Marketers and their communications **should not** falsely claim that a product is able to cure illness, dysfunction or malformations (CAP 12.6)
- Marketing communications that contain nutrition or health claims **must** be supported by documentary evidence to show they meet the conditions of use associated with the relevant claim, as specified in the EU Register. Claims must be presented clearly and **without exaggeration** (CAP 15.1)
- References to general benefits of a nutrient or food for overall good health or health-related well-being are **acceptable only** if accompanied by a specific authorised health claim (CAP 15.2)
- Marketers and their communications **must not** state or imply a food **prevents, treats or cures** human disease. Reduction of disease-risk claims are only acceptable if authorised on the EC register (CAP 15.6.2)
- Health claims that refer to the recommendation of an individual health professional are **not allowed**. Health claims that refer to the recommendation of an association are **only** acceptable if that association is a health-related charity or a national representative body of medicine, nutrition or dietetics (CAP 15.6.3)
- Marketing communications **must not** make reference to changes in bodily functions that could give rise to or exploit fear in the audience (CAP 15.6.4)
- Marketing communications **must not** make health claims that refer to a rate or amount of weight loss (CAP 15.6.6).



Dr Glenys Jones RNutr, Association for Nutrition
For more information: T: +44 (0)20 7291 8388 E: enquiries@associationfornutrition.org www.associationfornutrition.org

*AfNutr chats are independent twitter chats hosted by a team of AfN Registered Nutritionists. These are supported by AfN, however they are run independent of AfN and are open to anyone to contribute. The content of the discussions are therefore not endorsed by AfN and may not necessarily represent the views of AfN or its Registrants.