

Anti-social media

Shaun Sellars continues this exciting and essential series on ethical dilemmas in dentistry which appears in every second issue of the *BDJ*.



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The advent of the social media generation has allowed us to reach out to colleagues and patients to get our message across with an ease and efficiency that was unthinkable only a decade ago.

One knock-on effect of this is that no matter how hard we try, our conversations on social media are never really private. Our thoughts and musings are constantly under surveillance by one version of Big Brother or another. This has led to a number of regulatory cases where dentists and DCPs have faced sanctions because of posts on a variety of social media platforms.

The general response to these cases from the dental community is one of outrage, but is there more to it than that?

Invariably those posts which attract regulatory attention contain racist messages or threats of violence towards others. The standard response from a large section of the community is that these posts are just people exercising their freedom of speech (no matter how unpleasant that may be), and the GDC shouldn't be able to interfere with this. To a certain extent this is correct. Some of these cases also attract

police attention, and the majority of them see no further action. No laws are broken, and nobody's freedom of speech is affected. The regulatory issue arises solely because the alleged offence has been flagged to the GDC.

Part of the role of the GDC is maintaining public confidence in the dental profession and maintaining professional standards and conduct of registrants. They are duty bound to investigate claims of individual impropriety throughout the profession.

Here, the GDC is in a difficult situation. Faced with a clear cut example of racism or threatening behaviour, there has to be a sanction in some form. To not do so would effectively be saying 'it's OK to be a racist and be a dentist' or 'threats of violence are acceptable.' This is not the GDC infringing on freedom of speech, it's them protecting the privileged position we have in society. In many ways these are the easy cases. It's straightforward to say we shouldn't be racist, or threaten violence towards others, but where do we draw the line? As dental professionals, we are held to a higher standard of conduct than the general public, but that higher standard is largely undefined. For

example, is someone making disparaging remarks against a former colleague worthy of investigation?

The problems here are not necessarily with the actions of the GDC, but with those of registrants. Most of these cases arise as a result of 'blue on blue' reporting. That is, another registrant has reported the social media postings to the GDC, which has triggered the investigatory process. Whistleblowing is an important concept, and one which we all have a duty to consider, but the process is open to abuse. Those considering reporting other registrants to the GDC need to think long and hard as to whether this is in the public interest.

Of course, the GDC social media guidelines are there to help prevent this from occurring, but these can be boiled down into one single message: If you're not willing to say something on stage in front of a crowd of 1,000 people, then don't post it on social media.

Foundation announces new oral health strategy

On 1 August the Oral Health Foundation launched its new strategy for oral health, which will run until 2024.

The new strategy, titled 'Better oral health for all', addresses the world's growing oral health demands. It also sets out how the charity will tackle oral disease and help improve the quality of life for millions of people in the UK and around the world.

In a bid to eradicate dental disease and build a healthier society, the charity's new strategy focuses on a series of key oral health pledges. These include:

- Helping the most vulnerable members of society with oral health campaigns across local communities
- Making sure young people are given the very best start in life by providing them with the means to have a healthy mouth

- Giving all people access to free, practical and emotional support for their oral health problems
- Meeting the needs of organisations by creating products and programmes so they can deliver trusted educational messages and training for better oral health
- Making an impact on the health of future generations by influencing public health policy.

The strategic document comes at a time where half the globe's adult population have tooth decay, including 500 million children who have decay in their baby teeth.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, believes the new strategy will have a significant impact

on the charity's work, improving the oral health and wellbeing of the population. He said: 'We are more determined than ever before to champion good oral health and help create a better, healthier future for everyone.'

To help more people achieve good oral health, the Foundation plans to strengthen its partnership work with the dental and health professions, local councils and the education sector. The charity will also become more involved in policy, lobbying government for positive changes.

Throughout the five-year strategy, the charity will also organise several new oral health campaigns on sugar, dementia, alcohol, smoking and drug awareness.

The full strategy is available at <https://www.dentalhealth.org/strategy2024>.