

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA



Priya Tew
Freelance Dietitian,
Dietitian UK

Priya runs Dietitian UK, a freelance dietetic service that specialises in social media and media work, consultancy for food companies and private patient work.

www.dietitianuk.co.uk



DietitianUK



Priya_Tew



Priya_Tew

Social media can be such a blessing and such a pain in the proverbial all at once. With so many influencers and wellness experts out there, should the nutrition and medical profession be jumping in and adding to the noise? I very much think so, but we need to be wise about how it is done.

You don't need to go on a social media course or have a fancy plan and strategy, just set up an account and start joining the conversation. Follow others you know and admire and see what they do. Think about what platform will work best for you. Twitter is about sharing bite sized chunks of information and can be a great place to find out about new research and academic events, plus there are great chats to join in. On Instagram you share pictures with a mini blog of text, which can be more educational for the public. LinkedIn has more of a business focus and is a great place to connect with colleagues, sharing your work and learning in specialist groups. One thing I have learnt is that you cannot do it all at once! Focus on one platform at a time and find the one that works best for you.

A CHANCE TO CONNECT WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

I started using Twitter back in 2010 and have always used it for my business. I had no idea what I was doing or where it could lead. Through just exploring and playing on there, I connected with a team of other dietitians who were invaluable to my journey. I'm now in an Instagram pod with other dietitians and a couple of Facebook groups. When you are freelance or in



a specialist field it can be lonely and having others to bounce ideas off and check your thinking is so helpful. Think of it as group supervision, CPD and a virtual department. I've also met some amazing nutrition and medical professionals who are specialists in other areas, which means I can take all my questions to them. Do go and follow other dietitians and nutrition professionals. We are a small group of people and it's so important to be supporting one another. Social media can be a way to do that. Sharing your work, accomplishments and frustrations can be an encouragement to others.

BULLYING HAPPENS IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE

As much as I hate to say it, when you step onto social media as a healthcare professional there may well be some backlash. Trolling is common, when someone you may not know starts to make unkind comments or argue in an inflammatory way. Often there is little point engaging in these discussions and the best response is to mute people.

There can also be interesting and informative discussions within the healthcare community online. Social media can be a great place to debate and learn and challenge thinking. It's wise

to know when to take these conversations offline as they can be seen by the public.

WE NEED OUR VOICE TO BE LOUDER, BUT THAT COMES WITH A RESPONSIBILITY

With all the celebrities, influencers and wellness experts out there, our voices can seem quiet and can easily get lost. Keep on plugging away though, as there is usually someone taking what you say on board. Just because you don't get a reply doesn't mean your post hasn't been seen. Numbers aren't the aim of the game in my mind. It is better to have 200 followers who really follow you and get help from your messages than 2000 who are not bothered.

Personally, I think we have a responsibility to be part of social media, to have a presence and to be telling the public what we do, who we are and why our profession is so vital. As with everything we do as HCPs, it is also important to remember our code of conduct. Share messages that you would share in a clinical setting, be kind with our words and remember that you are speaking as a member of the profession not just as your personal self.

With social media being new and constantly evolving, there are not always guidelines on how we should act and what our role should be. That is where having open conversations with others who are doing similar things can be very helpful. The BDA and HCPC are also open to conversations on social media. Things like endorsements and adverts for brands are becoming an area that some HCPs are moving into and can be controversial. Only do what feels comfortable for you and reflection on your experience can be a very useful tool.

KEEP IT REAL

People want to hear the real story about our jobs and life, not the picture perfect 'I-never-eat-cake' version. Personally, I feel we need to create a trend showing realistic food, nutrition and life. The algorithms on social media mean that you are exposed more to the things you like, leading to a distorted viewpoint. This can lead to people thinking that a certain behaviour/eating style/look is normal, putting pressure on individuals to meet an unrealistic expectation. So, do post that image of a messy kitchen, about the meals that are so super simple and show how you really look and the mistakes that happen too. There are plenty of beautifully curated posts, but if we all tried to compete with those, it would be an impossible task. Find your own style.

HOW TO GET IT SEEN

Being part of a group/pod can be a great way to share ideas, to comment on each other's posts, to drive engagement and get encouragement. I've made friends on social media and continue to learn so much from other RDs' posts. Using hashtags, tagging people in your posts and being consistent will pay off. The main thing is to just get out there and post some content.

LOOK AFTER YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH

Social media can also take over your time and energy. Whilst we have a responsibility to be sharing credible content, it doesn't mean we have to reply to every comment and be on social media at every opportunity. Be aware that it can impact your mental health and it is ok to step back and have a break. In fact, it's great to talk about this and role model it to others.

NHD eArticles with CPD

- Continuing professional development
- Answer questions
- Download & keep for your files

Visit NHDmag.com

