
Briefing summary

- **Who:** For people involved in health care improvement projects who want to use social media to communicate their work.
- **Why:** Social media is transforming the way people and organisations engage with one another. By harnessing social media channels, those leading improvement can extend their networks, share their learning with a wider audience and reach decision makers.
- **What:** The briefing covers the major social media channels and factors to consider in getting the most from them.

Why is social media important in improvement work?

“We will increasingly communicate and connect through ‘weak ties’, those people who may be different to us, but to whom we can connect to much more easily through social media, as well as through the ‘strong ties’ (peer-to-peer communication) that have dominated in health care improvement.”

Helen Bevan, Chief Transformation Officer, NHS Improving Quality

Online social networking is now used daily to communicate by about one third of adults (OFCOM, 2012). But what does this mean for people working in health care? An NHS Confederation survey looking at social media use in the public, health and media sectors found that the vast majority of survey participants in senior roles were using social media, with preferred channels including Twitter and LinkedIn (both at 94%), Facebook (77%) and YouTube (71%).

By using social media to communicate your improvement work, you can:

- reach people who might take an interest in applying your ideas (early adopters)
- connect with a decision maker to whom you might not otherwise get access
- influence debates about a policy area where you have experience or evidence to share.



Which social media channels to use?

Recent years have seen a growth in the number of social media channels, and it can feel bewildering to know which channels to invest time in. A helpful rule of thumb is to focus only on a few channels where your audiences are most active, rather than spreading yourself too thinly.

This is because building a following and achieving impact through any social media channel will require commitment over time. Success depends on:

- being clear about what you're trying to achieve through social media
- defining the audiences you want to reach and observing their online interaction to better understand their needs and interests
- maintaining a frequent and consistent level of interaction – little and often is best
- having a plan in place for the content you will post, and posting content that others will want to share (twitter advises that people more readily share images and film, tweets that pose a question and provide an answer in a link, and memorable quotes)
- above all, recognising and responding to the content of others.

Major social media channels to consider

Here are some factors to consider when using the social media channels identified by the NHS Confederation as most actively used by health care audiences in the UK.

CHANNEL	GOOD FOR	CONSIDER
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking news. Reaching journalists, commentators and opinion formers. Understanding how opinion and debates are shifting in real time. Driving online traffic to web sites and blogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posting content regularly (one–three times per day). Posting content that encourages interaction. Building rapport by re-tweeting or commenting on others’ tweets. Using hashtags (#) to make it easier for people to find your tweets. Being ready to respond if others comment about you.
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional networking. Communities of practice/interest. Gathering information and feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining an up-to-date profile. Posting regular updates and commenting on the updates of others. Setting up or participating in online discussion groups.
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaching public audiences. Tapping into public debate. Platform for multimedia outputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Running a poll or survey. Posting films and photographs. Running, following or participating in campaigns.
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting live events. Platform for multimedia outputs. Campaigning/opinion shaping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing an audio presentation. Publicising a film.

Remember that unless you’re posting content in a private group, your updates are available for anyone to view. Avoid giving personal views on social media that might conflict with the views of your employer, and bear in mind that whatever you post can be legitimately quoted by journalists or shared with anyone else online.



What others say

Aneurin Bevan Continuous improvement (ABCi) was set up by the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in 2013 to support their clinical teams working to improve the quality of care. The programme created its own twitter account in 2013, which now has more than 1,400 followers.

Mel Laidler, Programme Manager for ABCi, said: *“When we got started on twitter there was no real appetite or expectation over what we would achieve, but it has put us in contact with people all over the world who are interested in our work. This interest has enabled us to celebrate and share what our clinical teams are achieving, and it also helps give their work added credibility internally.”*

Mel adds: “My advice for others thinking of using twitter to promote their improvement work is to be bold. It has been really powerful for us.”

For more information on ABCi, see: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/866/page/69347>

Follow them on twitter: [@ABCiAB](https://twitter.com/ABCiAB)

Resources

Current use, future trends and opportunities in public sector social media, A survey by Cogitamus for the NHS Confederation, 2012.

<http://jbmccrea.com/nhs-confederation-social-media-study/>

Bringing the Social Media #Revolution to Healthcare, Mayo Clinic Centre for Social Media, 2012.

The Edge: A hub for change activists in health to exchange information and ideas, NHS Improving Quality.

www.theedge.nhsiq.nhs.uk