

Briefing 88

Increasing staff engagement with social media

As the NHS continues to implement the biggest reforms since its inception, and begins to change the poor cultures highlighted in the Francis report, staff engagement has never been more important. As Dean Royles, chief executive of the NHS Employers organisation, says: “We need world-class staff engagement if we are to turn Francis into a byword for improvement rather than failure.”

For those of you who prefer numbers, the NHS in England spends roughly 55 per cent of its £106.1 billion budget on staffing. That’s £58.4 billion. Staff are the NHS’ biggest asset. Improving staff engagement helps get the most out of the NHS’ huge investment in people.

This briefing discusses four main questions:

- How can social media platforms be used to engage staff?
- What examples of engaging staff through the use of social media platforms already exist?
- What could you do now to increase staff engagement by using social media content?
- What considerations should you take into account when using social media to increase staff engagement?

It is aimed at the NHS human resources (HR) community but will also be of interest to communicators and line managers.

This briefing contains case studies from the NHS and theoretical applications of social media. It is not a step-by-step guide, it is an overview of the different possibilities that social media offers individuals and organisations to increase staff engagement.

Key points

- Social media won’t be your only staff engagement tool; it is one option when looking at how to engage staff in the work they do.
- Small, frequent reminders of how teams and individuals are making a difference help build staff engagement.
- By monitoring what is said about your organisation on social media platforms, you can begin to use social media to help improve staff engagement and the reputation of your organisation.
- Social media platforms give individuals the space in which to show their professional personality and celebrate the successes of those around them.

What is staff engagement?

Engaged staff act in a positive way about the work they do, the people they work with and the organisation they work in.

There are many dimensions of staff engagement. Figure 1 highlights some key aspects of engagement.

Using social media to increase staff engagement

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to use social media to increase staff engagement:

- bringing the outside in
- taking the inside out.

Both are based on the principle

that human beings like to be told they have done a good job. To know if someone is doing a good job, views, opinions and comments are needed. Social media platforms offer NHS staff an opportunity to hear and see who's doing a good job and what is being said about them and their services. This helps build cases for change and positivity throughout the organisation.

Figure 1. Staff engagement – behaviours and feelings that indicate staff are engaged



Source: *The staff engagement toolkit, NHS Employers*

Key resources

- NHS Employers [The staff engagement toolkit](#) – the ‘go to’ collection of evidence, knowledge and practical help on staff engagement for NHS managers and employees at all levels.
- [Engage for Success](#) – a multi-industry staff engagement movement, providing excellent case studies and evidence of the power and potential of staff engagement.

The screenshot shows the 'ABOUT' page of the Engage for Success website. It features a sidebar with links like 'WHAT IS ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS?', 'WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?', 'THE FOUR ENABLERS OF ENGAGEMENT', 'WHY DOES IT MATTER?', 'WHO IS INVOLVED?', and 'THE BIGGER PICTURE'. The main content area is titled 'ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS IS...' and contains text explaining the movement's mission to improve personal growth, organisational growth, and ultimately growth for Britain by releasing more of the capability and potential of people.

The screenshot shows the first page of the 'Staff engagement in the NHS: a quick guide'. It features a blue header with the title and the NHS Employers logo. Below the header is a section titled 'Staff engagement – making a difference within your organisation' with text about its purpose. It includes a list of resources for workforce leaders and a skip navigation section. On the right side, there is a photo of a person in a hospital setting and a vertical sidebar with navigation icons.

Patients are talking about you already

If you search for ‘NHS’ on Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, or any of the other social media platforms popular in the UK, you’ll find thousands of results. Within these are people talking about your part of the NHS. They may not know to call it a ‘community trust’ or a ‘university hospitals foundation trust’, but they’ll be talking about your work nonetheless.

Importantly, what they are saying about your services can be a predictor of how good their individual treatment is and how good your services are overall.¹

Social media is a great way for staff to listen to what is being said about their organisation, to understand and empathise with service users’ views. It is less detailed than traditional written complaints, but more dynamic and just as important.

The experience of the patient feedback website [Patient Opinion](#) is that nearly everyone who leaves a negative opinion does so not just to raise concerns but also to help the NHS improve. They want to feed back what could be better so that the next patient doesn’t have the same negative experience; for example, this [post](#) on the website.

Route 1: Bringing the outside in

Online comments about your trust and/or service have the potential to engage staff with their job and organisation. By using existing content, you don't have to worry about being active on a social media platform yourself. This is the easiest way to integrate social media content into your staff engagement strategy – it can be as simple as copy and paste!

Google Alerts are a simple and effective way of keeping up to date on what is written online about key words such as NHS [location]. Use Boolean operators (AND, OR) to help set up searches for more complex queries. The [BBC's guide to Boolean operators](#) is very helpful.

Working with positive feedback

Positive feedback from the social media world should be given to the ward, team or individual concerned. This will help them understand that their role

What is being said about your trust online?

Try searching on [twitter.com/search](#) for NHS + [your location]. What clues does it give you about how people might view your service and other NHS services in the area? What positive feedback is out there?

How could you take that to the relevant team? Would a screen shot be enough? Would a little more information about the commenter help? What does their Twitter biography tell you about them?

counts – one part of the 'staff engagement star' (see page 10) – and therefore help increase their engagement with their job.

A summary of the positive feedback the trust, teams and individuals have received in the last week or month should be shared with colleagues via staff briefings, meetings or newsletters.

The content on social media platforms gives NHS organisations a chance to celebrate the often overlooked details and successes that make a good service great. Small, frequent reminders of how teams and individuals are

making a difference will help build staff engagement. For more examples, see page 6.

Working with negative feedback

Negative feedback is not bad. It can in fact be far more valuable than positive feedback. Without negative feedback we would never know where to improve. Being open and transparent and asking for feedback, including negative, helps develop better public and private services.

For example, imagine you have found negative comments on Twitter about the service you work in. It shows that patients are frustrated at not knowing

From yearly to weekly feedback

The annual NHS Staff Survey provides a valuable snapshot of staff opinion. As more people use social media platforms, increasing numbers of people are getting used to the idea of near real-time feedback – for example, asking questions of their train operator or local councillor and expecting an answer back in a short timeframe.

As people become accustomed to this level and speed of interaction, it is having an effect on NHS staff. As staff move from their personal lives into their professional lives there can be a stark difference in the timelines to receive feedback. Often staff have structured monthly, bi-yearly or yearly appraisals with their managers. These may not meet their appetite for regular feedback. Feedback received via social media offers a way to help them get regular feedback that doesn't rely on a face-to-face meeting being squeezed into shifts.

how long they are likely to have to wait to see the clinician or why the clinic is running late. You bring that feedback into work and show the manager of that service, who dismisses it as "just the way it is." In that moment an opportunity is lost.

If the manager had said, "I've never really thought about it like that. OK, we'll bring it up in the team meeting and see if we can find a solution to the problem", an opportunity is created. In the team meeting a solution is found by the team, not imposed by the manager, and you are asked to implement it. The next week you see some positive feedback on Twitter saying how well informed the patient felt.

This scenario has examples of great management

and leadership, personal development and involvement in decision making – that covers three of the five points of the staff engagement star. Staff engagement in the clinic improves, patients enter the clinic rooms feeling informed, and subsequently engage better with their treatment.

Considerations when bringing the outside in

- Which social media platforms could you monitor?
- Whose job is it to bring the outside in for your team/department/organisation?
- Should staff from the service be encouraged to reply to the comments online? When might a reply be useful? When might a reply be damaging?

Route 2: Taking the inside out

Having looked at how you can use the social media content that is already out there without having to be a contributor yourself, we will now discuss how producing your own social media content can also help improve staff engagement.

Using social media tools to get regular feedback from staff

Intranet forums, generic feedback inboxes and staff feedback meetings are commonplace across the NHS. They are used by organisations to give staff a way of feeding back, but often lack a sense of purpose. What do you feed back on if you're asked for feedback on everything to do with your job?

By using blogging platforms, senior NHS leaders in each organisation are able to promote feeding back by highlighting a specific area of the organisation's work in which they would like to improve.

Dr Mark Newbold, chief executive of Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust, used this approach to promote a 'safety September' month on his blog, [posting a video used by his trust](#) to help raise awareness of medication errors and how to minimise the number of them happening at the trust. A [follow-up post highlighted the success of the month](#) and thanked all

Who's job is it to monitor social media sites?

While most social media platforms, such as Facebook, are free to use, the job of monitoring what is said about an organisation takes time and effort. Someone will need to be paid to do it, analyse the results and ensure the feedback gets to the right part of the organisation.

This briefing outlines the potential benefits of monitoring and using social media feedback. If 'bringing the outside in' is to happen, the role of the monitor will have to be worked out by each organisation. As Dean Royles has said on his [blog](#), "Using social media isn't just an add-on or just another task in your already busy day, but a fundamental change to the way we work."

This begs the question – if you are to integrate social media feedback into the organisation, what work that you do now needs to stop to make room for social media monitoring?

the staff who were involved, personally naming the health and safety and patient safety team members to thank them.

It should be noted, however, that asking for staff feedback in public can have drawbacks. Hard, honest debates are often difficult to hold when the participants understand that the media and public are able to access them. Discussing the intricacies of individual patient care or ward-specific cultures in public can break confidentiality and increase inter-team tensions. A balance between public and private must be found by the organisation.

Celebrating success

NHS staff do some incredible things every day. They save lives, give up their Christmases and help people pass away with dignity. Many of these incredible acts and behaviours are over in minutes and forgotten even more quickly – it's "normal" and "nothing out of the ordinary." It may be normal for staff, but for the patients and their family and friends it's incredible.

Just as receiving positive feedback from patients can help engage staff, receiving it from your peers is equally, if not more, powerful. If you take the time to consider what 'normal' successes happen around you every day in work, you'll soon see there is a lot to celebrate.

By making these successes public via social media platforms, such as the trust's Twitter account, Facebook page or blogs by clinicians and directors, the great work of staff can receive recognition from peers and the public. Imagine how good you'd feel if people 'liked' a Facebook update about your latest qualification or you completing 20 years of service.

Celebrating success can feel very corporate. It can slide into being all about 'staying on message' and suffer from a lack of personality. If done well, however, it can give the organisation a personality (the collective personality of staff tweeting professionally, for instance) and help improve not just staff engagement but the organisation's social media brand as well.² Some examples of how individuals and organisations are already doing this are shown below.

Considerations when taking the inside out

- Whose job is it to take the inside out for the team/department/organisation?
- How could your team/department/organisation resource this approach? Can you feed into an existing organisation-wide process?
- What successes would you like to be praised for? What makes you feel proud about your work?

Examples of successful use of social media as part of staff engagement

Below are examples of how different approaches to using social media platforms are helping organisations and individuals engage staff around their professions and jobs. The examples show how social media use doesn't just add value to those who are on social media platforms, but to those around them too.

Rachel Newson, Chief Executive, Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership Trust ([@ChiefExecCWPT](#))

The organisation Rachel leads provides mental healthcare for those with learning disabilities and physical healthcare in the community. Her staff work across 70 different locations and don't have easy access to desktop computers for most of their working day.

Rachel started tweeting in a professional capacity to help the process of creating a single organisation after Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership Trust was created from merging four primary care trust provider arms.

Rachel has actively promoted her Twitter account to staff and has used her account to praise the work of staff members who also use Twitter. In her experience, those staff who are actively using social media to

discuss their professions are more engaged in work. Rachel has seen how discussions and information on Twitter translate into new ideas and connections in the workplace, helping the organisation develop.

Rachel says: "I find Twitter a good way to show my staff how proud of them I am. It has helped me celebrate the successes of those staff who use social media to bring in new information and ideas to our organisation. They're really setting the standard."

"Over the next 12 months I want all of my staff to know that they have permission to use social media at work to help improve our services."

Dr Mark Newbold, Chief Executive, Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust ([@DrMarkNewbold](#))

Mark uses both Twitter and his [personal blog](#) to talk about his weekly diary and his thoughts from the past week's

meetings. His open and honest approach has won him many followers inside and outside the trust.

Rob Webster, Chief Executive, Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust ([@RobWebster_LCH](#))

Rob uses both Twitter and [guest blogs](#). He has become part of the online health community in Leeds and is often found further afield offering advice to helpful links to staff across the NHS.

Rob is always happy to share his experiences; in the example at the foot of the page, with Paul Mears, chief executive of Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Lisa Rodrigues, Chief Executive, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust ([@LisaSaysThis](#))

Lisa uses Twitter and her trust's website to talk about her week and connect with NHS staff online. She publishes a weekly [open letter](#) on the trust's website in which she writes

honestly about the challenges facing her trust and the wider NHS. This helps show the public the direction she is taking the trust in.

David Ford, Clinical Governance Lead at NHS Direct and Nurse Board Member at NHS Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group ([@DGFoord](#))

David is a highly engaged member of the NHS Direct team; he puts some of this down to being allowed to network on social media platforms with other professionals. He compiles lists of NHS accounts on Twitter and is an active member of the [#nhssm](#), [#wenurses](#) and [#nhschange](#) communities.

David echoes Rachel Newson's experiences of how social media helps to plug him into a wide range of perspectives and information. The diversity of views and experiences helps him discuss and debate his profession and he acts as a strong NHS Direct advocate online.

Using Twitter, David is able to build up a picture of how other NHS staff and the public view NHS Direct. This has enabled him to 'bring the outside in' by showing colleagues the need for improvement in some areas and successes in others. He works with the communications team to put this feedback into staff briefings.



Paul Mears [@Pauldmears](#)

@RobWebster_LCH rob can we talk on this as working with GPs comm svcs and social care locally on this keen to hear ur experience
[Hide conversation](#) [Reply](#) [Retweet](#) [Favorite](#)

2:15 PM - 16 Oct 12 · Details



Rob Webster [@RobWebster_LCH](#)

Hi @Pauldmears - happy for you or your team to talk to me or folks here. Some resources at leeds.gov.uk/residents/Page... DM me.
[Find out more](#)

David's use of social media has led him to make connections with other NHS Direct colleagues online that would not have been made offline. These connections lead to increased internal networking within the organisation, strengthening NHS Direct.

In 2013, David plans to make sure internal awards, such as ten years of service, are promoted on social media to help show staff how proud of them the organisation and he are.

Victoria Betton, Deputy Director of Strategy & Partnerships, Leeds & York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust ([@VictoriaBetton](#))

Victoria oversees the trust's use of social media and is the internal expert and advocate for social media. The trust's communications and engagement team includes a specialist e-communications officer.

The trust promotes its staff recognition scheme on Twitter and Facebook, so that staff, service users and members can nominate staff for the monthly award. Each month's winner has their picture taken and a short story written about why they won. This is posted on Twitter and Facebook, showing staff that the trust is proud of their achievements and promoting a positive brand online.

The trust is also starting to use videos to enable directors to amplify messages they wish to share with staff. The Trust has [Vimeo](#) and YouTube channels where they post video content, which are also embedded within their website and shared via Twitter and Facebook. The videos are used to help staff talk to staff independently of their location, and complement the existing face-to-face interactions.

NHS Manchester – digital and social media award winner, [NHSE #flufighters awards](#)

NHS Manchester has harnessed social media to support the national flu fighter campaign, promoting awareness among NHS staff, patients, carers and the wider public. They have used various digital platforms – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest – to promote the importance of flu vaccination, embedding #McrFluSafe alongside flu fighter.

Personal, Fair and Diverse Champions campaign

This campaign has built up a network of over 5,000 NHS employees who have committed to taking action, however small, to create a personal, fair and diverse NHS. The campaign is supported by a Twitter account ([@PFDChamps](#)) and [online resource pack](#).

Next steps

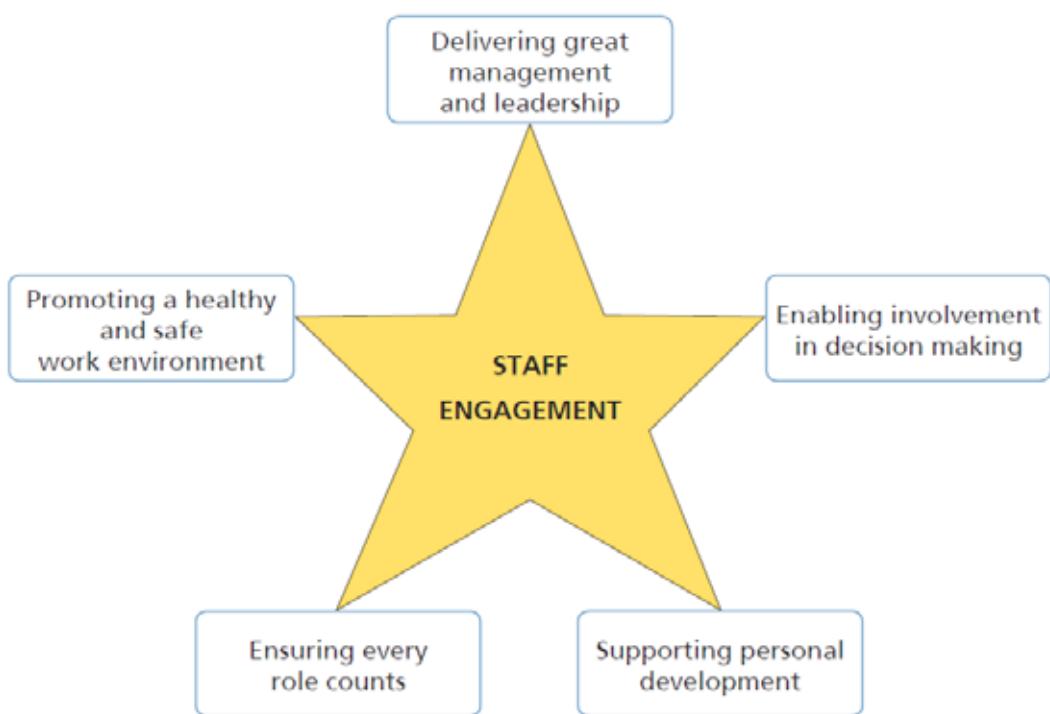
1. Set up some Google Alerts. By getting a daily or weekly summary of what is being said online about your service and/or organisation, you'll begin to get a feel for what the public thinks you are doing right and what they think you're doing wrong. This can help individuals, teams and departments improve.
2. Use socialmention.com to monitor what is being said about your organisation on Twitter and Facebook. This free service also provides a positive/neutral/negative comment count.
3. Become a social media leader. If you already tweet or blog in a professional capacity, why not share your account names with your colleagues? Bring the interesting information and discussions you find online into work and share them with your colleagues. Connect with other staff at your organisation who use social media in their roles. Leaders aren't always the ones at the top of the hierarchy, so don't worry if you're not the chief executive – you can still lead.
4. Ask your organisation's communications team if any of the senior management are using social media professionally. If they are, make a note of their usernames and/or blog addresses and see what they're saying. Send them your thoughts – if they're using social media, they are there to engage.
5. Suggest to the communications team that they promote staff achievements and awards on any social media accounts they manage. Suggest the same to any staff you know who use social media. Perhaps there is also an unofficial Facebook group of staff members which would like to promote their colleagues' good work.
6. Read your organisation's internet usage and social media policies. Do they allow and promote the use of social media by staff? If not, why not?

References

1. See, for example, [BMJ Quality and Safety](#) and [The New England Journal of Medicine](#).
2. See [NHS Employers briefing 87 – HR and social media in the NHS](#).



The Staff Engagement Star: Excellent staff engagement results from a number of factors



Notes

NHS Employers

NHS Employers represents trusts in England on workforce issues and helps employers to ensure the NHS is a place where people want to work. The NHS workforce is at the heart of quality patient care and we believe that employers must drive the workforce agenda. We work with employers to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

Acknowledgements

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