

# Online professional presence for healthcare professionals

## An interview with Alexis Kalmar, Marketing and Communications Manager at Skills for Health

*With concerns around areas including patient confidentiality, many healthcare professionals are understandably cautious about having an active, visible presence on social media. However there are many benefits to be gained from using social media as a professional working in this sector.*

*We spoke to Alexis Kalmar, Marketing and Communications Manager at Skills for Health, who gave us her insights on how appropriate use of social media can be beneficial for healthcare professionals.*

The interview was conducted via email. A question set was devised and sent to Alexis Kalmar. This is her response.

### **How does LinkedIn differ from other social media platforms?**

LinkedIn is unique; it has built its usership around professionals who are career oriented. It not only allows its users to build a professional profile but really lets users build their own brand. With the use of its micro-blogging page “Pulse”, users are encouraged to publish articles which are of interest to them, and more specifically, pertain to the industry which they work in. Recently, it has acquired Lynda, an online platform that provides courses which are mostly free. This acquisition further strengthens LinkedIn’s mission to “connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful.” Moreover, influential users, such as Sir Richard Branson are called “LinkedIn influencers”. These influencers post regularly and if you follow them, you can learn valuable lessons of business from them.

## Why is it beneficial for students, particularly students wanting to become healthcare professionals, to join LinkedIn?

In a recent study, it was reported that the NHS was represented as the leading employer on LinkedIn. For students wanting to become healthcare professionals, this is especially valuable information. Having a profile on LinkedIn, allows NHS employers to search and view your profile should they wish to fill a vacancy. More and more employers are using LinkedIn as a means of saving recruitment costs. You are able to connect with likeminded people and absorb learning from key figures in the industry, allowing you to keep up to date with news and relevant discussions.

## Some healthcare professionals are nervous about having a visible social media presence. What would you say to them?

I agree – everyone needs to be cautious about what you post on social media, especially if you are in full-time employment. However, there are a few measures which will protect your privacy; for instance, you can turn on your privacy settings so that you are in control you sees your posts (on all social media channels, including LinkedIn). I would suggest that if you do work in healthcare that you download NHS Employers' guide to social media here: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2014/09/new-social-media-induction-guide-for-new-nhs-communications-staff> . Moreover, every employer should have a social media policy. Make sure you adhere to these guidelines; they vary from organisation to organisation.

## Are there any specific guidelines that healthcare professionals should follow when building their professional online presence?

Yes – the NHS Employers' guide to social media is a useful tool: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2014/09/new-social-media-induction-guide-for-new-nhs-communications-staff> . Also, ask your marketing and communications team if you can see a copy of their social media policy. These are a set of guidelines which most organisations have. Be sure to follow them so you don't break any protocol. And remember, if you have to think twice about whether you should post something or not – then you probably shouldn't. Just be sensible.

## Many healthcare professionals have heard social media ‘horror stories’ but could you identify some areas of good practice or positive benefits from using social media within this sector?

Social media allows you to learn from others – whether you are a student or a long-term professional, learning from others will always help get you further in life. Social media allows you to also view the latest news in a specific sector and communicate with like-minded professionals. Should you be working on a particular project for instance, and you need help with something, you can ask your social media following for assistance. For instance, [myhealthskills.com](http://myhealthskills.com) is a social media network for healthcare professionals encouraging professionals to share best practice.

## What do you think are the essentials to a good LinkedIn profile?

3 key areas make up a “good profile” – honesty, being true to who you are and following protocol. Never post indecent items; also, never post controversial items which may get you into trouble. There is a whole stigma attached to social media that people post items to get a reaction from people. Up-to-date, relevant information, recommendations and a profile picture are a must!

## How should a student or healthcare professional go about deciding what skills to include in their profile?

Include those skills which will help you secure a job. Remember, employers are looking at the social media profiles of candidates more and more.

## Who should students connect with on LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is great in that if you connect with current lecturers and/or peers you can ask them to give you an online reference which potential employers can view. Connect with lecturers, peers, join groups which are relevant to your sector and work you want to get involved with; build relationships with users and invite them to join your network.

## What benefits can healthcare professionals gain from joining groups on LinkedIn?

Groups are great as you can learn best practice from peers. You can join in discussions and have your views heard. You can also see what other people's views are and respond to them, creating a dialogue between yourself and the user. This can lead to connecting with them and they may become a valuable contact in the future.

## Other than LinkedIn, what other networking platforms would you recommend?

[Myhealthskills.com](http://Myhealthskills.com) is the free social network of its type for healthcare employees and aims to encourage likeminded people who are passionate about workforce transformation, learning and skills in the sector to network, to share best practice, expertise and resources. The network boasts over 3200 members, who are all healthcare professionals ranging from HCAs to psychiatrists and senior healthcare managers. My Health Skills aims to bridge gaps and appeal to a diverse membership including; nurses, support staff, consultants, volunteers, academics, charities, patients and carers. It encourages its members to 'Join a Group, start a group, make a change.'

Interview conducted by Kelly Snape

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