Student orthodontic therapist

Chloe is a conscientious student doing well on her course. She goes out for a meal with her fellow students to celebrate the end of exams in the small market town where they are studying. As the evening progresses one of the students suggests moving on to a pub and the evening extends into a late night and unplanned heavy drinking. One of the students photographs Chloe holding a bottle of wine and falling over on the pavement outside of the pub they have been drinking at. Chloe’s friend then posts it on social media with the caption asking for a good hangover cure as they are seeing patients in the morning, and describes the patients rudely.

What do you think Chloe should do next?

Select an option:

- Call in sick the next morning explaining she has a virus
- Go to the clinic in the morning so she doesn’t let down the patients and take paracetamol to reduce the hangover
Call in sick with the real reason and apologise

See what Chloe did next...

Chloe feels terrible in the morning but attends her work placement. Two of the other students are ill and don’t turn up. The post is seen by the employer on the work placement who is linked to them on the social media site. Chloe smells strongly of alcohol and the supervisor has to cancel her appointments for patient safety reasons. Chloe instantly apologises for turning up to the clinic with a hangover. She hadn’t realised that she had been photographed and what had been posted on social media. Her supervisor explained that this could be very serious if patients had seen this. Chloe’s supervisor had contacted the person who had posted it and it had been removed. Her supervisor explained that student dental professionals had to bear in mind that they may be seen differently to students who don’t have responsibility for patients.

As this is the first time this has happened Chloe received a warning which went on her student record. She had shown insight and apologised so no formal student fitness to practise concerns were raised. She had to declare this on her GDC application form.

Chloe’s friend who posted the photograph and comments on the social media site was also questioned about the incident. Her actions had broken the social media policy and her student fitness to practise was called into question. This was not the first time her friend had used social media inappropriately so the student fitness to practise panel issued condition of increased supervision and remedial tuition. She had to declare this on her GDC application form.
GDC principles

9.1 you must ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients’ trust in you and the public’s trust in the dental profession.

9.1.3 You should not publish anything that could affect patients’ and the public’s confidence in you, or the dental profession, in any public media, unless this is done as part of raising a concern. Public media includes social networking sites, blogs and other social media. In particular, you must not make personal, inaccurate or derogatory comments about patients or colleagues. See our guidance on social networking for more information.

Other guidance

GDC social media guidance

Discussion points

- What do you think about what is expected of student dental professionals compared to other students?
- How do you think this might affect how you use social media or behave outside of your course eg at the weekend?
- What would you expect if you were a patient?
- What do you think a patient’s reaction would be to seeing this post and reading the comments and what might be the possible consequences?
- Do you think Chloe realised that her drunken behaviour was unprofessional or do you think she was only concerned because it had been photographed and posted on social media?

Disclaimer

These fictional case studies are for illustration purposes only and should not be relied on to make clinical decisions. Their aim is to put GDC guidance in context, exploring how some of the principles might work in practice.

The case studies cannot be relied on to be clinically accurate. Nor do the case studies intend to show the “correct” interpretation of GDC guidance, only one (or more) possible interpretation(s).