**Wickersley Medical Practice**

**Social Media Use Policy for Patients**

**1. Introduction**

At Wickersley Medical Practice, we are committed to providing high-quality care and maintaining a respectful and professional environment for both our staff and patients. This policy outlines our expectations regarding the use of social media by patients and the potential consequences of posting disparaging or abusive comments about our practice or staff.

**2. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to:

* Ensure a respectful and professional environment for all staff and patients.
* Protect the reputation of Wickersley Medical Practice and its staff.
* Provide guidance on the appropriate use of social media by patients.
* Outline the actions that may be taken in response to disparaging or abusive comments posted online.

**3. Scope**

This policy applies to all patients of Wickersley Medical Practice and their friends and family members who may post comments about the practice or its staff on social media platforms.

**4. Definition of Disparaging Comments**

For the purposes of this policy, disparaging comments include any online behaviour directed at practice staff that is unwarranted and deliberately intended to upset, threaten, bully, or otherwise cause distress and aggravation. This includes, but is not limited to:

* False or misleading statements.
* Personal attacks or insults.
* Threats of violence or harm.
* Harassment or bullying.
* Defamatory remarks.

**5. Reporting and Recording**

If a member of staff becomes aware of disparaging comments posted by a patient or their associates, the following steps should be taken:

* **Report**: The incident should be reported to the practice manager and/or Data Protection Officer (DPO).
* **Record**: Keep a record of the post or message, including screenshots or saved copies of the content.
* **Investigate**: The practice manager and DPO will investigate the incident to determine the appropriate course of action.

**6. Actions and Consequences**

Depending on the severity and nature of the comments, the following actions may be taken:

* **No Response**: In cases where the post is annoying but poses no harm and fails to attract attention, it may be best not to respond to avoid aggravating the situation.
* **Direct Response**: A quick, measured response using the right tone may be appropriate in some situations. This should be done after seeking advice on the benefits and risks involved.
* **Formal Action**: For more serious cases, formal action may be required, including:
  + Requesting the removal of the post from the social media platform.
  + Engaging a PR specialist for a coordinated response.
  + Reporting the incident to the police if it constitutes harassment or a threat of violence.
  + Taking legal action, such as seeking an injunction to prevent further posts or claiming damages.

**7. Support for Staff**

Wickersley Medical Practice is committed to supporting staff who are victims of online abuse. Staff members are encouraged to report any incidents and will receive guidance and support throughout the process.

**8. Patient Communication**

Patients will be informed of this policy and the potential consequences of posting disparaging comments through:

* Notices in the practice.
* Information on the practice website.
* Direct communication if an incident occurs.

**9. Review and Updates**

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to ensure it remains effective and relevant.