Social Media: Use in Research

Social Media can be used as a tool for research in a number of ways, such as advertising, recruiting and communicating with participants. As well as taking the time to understand the advantages and limitations of the different social media platforms (to be used in your research project), please also ensure you consider the relevant ethical and governance issues when considering the use of social media in your research study.

Governance:

1. All use of Social Media e.g. Facebook, for a research study must be approved by the RCH Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and must comply with RCH and MCRI policies and guidelines. Please ensure you have read the relevant Institution policy:

    - RCH Social Media Policy
    - RCH Media Protocol
    - Media Policy & Procedure (MCRI7001)
    - MCRI Social Media Policy

2. Researchers must not contravene the relevant terms and conditions of the Social Media sites they use e.g. Facebook Policy.

3. RCH and MCRI employees wishing to create or use a specific social media account or Facebook page for research purposes must provide (with their application to Research Ethics & Governance for HREC approval) written approval for the social media use from either RCH Corporate Communications or MCRI Public Relations as a supporting department - emailed correspondence showing approval and conditions (if applicable) is acceptable.

4. RCH & MCRI Facebooks may be used to recruit patients if agreed to by RCH Corporate Communications or MCRI Public Relations. (The Facebook page will contain limited information regarding the study and then provide a link to another site or research contact number.) Details to be provided with your research application for RCH HREC approval.

Research Protocol:

The protocol (submitted with the project application) must include a clear description of the proposed use of social media. As an example, researchers should provide/consider the following detail:

1. Researchers need to provide complete detail regarding which social media site(s) will be used, how it will be utilised and by whom, for example:

    a. paid advertisements that target by groups such as gender or age range in order to advertise research and recruit patients;
    b. advertising or recruitment through an existing Facebook page (i.e. RCH Facebook);
    c. the use of the private messaging system for study information or tracing a past patient/participant; or
    d. use of a specific Facebook/Twitter account for a study.

2. For a paid Facebook advertisement of a research study, the advertisement may involve a few words (and/or a picture) and then a link to another specific website (or a contact person) should potential participants want more information about the research, thus protecting privacy.

3. If researchers wish to trace/contact people via the private messaging service, a tracing message (approved by the HREC) should be used as there may be more than one person with the same name.

4. Researchers will need to address and clarify how participant privacy and confidentiality will be protected (see further information below).

Research Specific Social Media Accounts:

If researchers wish to apply for approval to set up a specific Social Media account (i.e. Facebook or Twitter) for a research study, the following must be considered:

1. A written proposal must be submitted to RCH Corporate Communications and/or MCRI Public Relations outlining which platforms the team wishes to utilise, for what purpose, how the platform will be managed and monitored, and what content will be featured. A social media account or page cannot be set up without prior approval from RCH Corporate Communications or MCRI Public Relations.

2. Privacy settings should be controlled by the Study team e.g. if necessary users are not able to identify other users.

3. By acting as a 'person' the Administrator can have control over who can view the profile, as requests to join must be accepted before the profile can be viewed.

4. If there is to be an invitation to participants to follow the Study on Facebook, the ethics application should detail the invitation process and the Invitation (wording/documentation) should be submitted with the application.

5. Researchers should consider if or how administrators might ensure that only consented parents/guardians/participants are 'friends' of the Facebook page.

6. Consider whether Wall posts should either be a) approved by a Study Administrator or b) reviewed in a timely manner (and taken down if inappropriate) by a Study Administrator.

7. Information regarding the limitations to privacy must be clearly outlined e.g. depending on an individual's privacy settings the study name can appear on their own page if they 'like' the study page; parents/participants may be able to see the names of other participants if an individual 'likes' a comment or photo on the study page or if they write a comment (post)for the study page.

    Depending on the sensitivity of the research matter privacy and confidentiality (or lack of) may need to be made clear to participants. Researchers may wish to consider the use of a warning e.g. *Depending on your Facebook privacy settings, posts that you follow, like or comment on may be able to be seen by your Facebook Friends or others.* However it should be acknowledged and taken into account that there is no guarantee that participants will read this warning before 'liking' any comments or photos.