



Upholding professional sanctuaries: protecting dental nurses' safe spaces in social media groups



By **Rebecca Silver**¹

In today's digital age, social media has revolutionised the way healthcare professionals interact, share knowledge, and seek support. For dental nurses, social media groups have emerged as vital safe spaces where they can connect with peers, exchange insights, and find solace

amidst the challenges of their profession. However, the integrity of these safe spaces is becoming increasingly diluted by the influx of other dental professionals. The safety of these groups is potentially being eroded, causing an increase in dental nurses either not posting, thereby alienating themselves from the profession or not being able to seek support or help, or posting anonymously. It also means that people are less likely to respond, or respond negatively, if they see others doing this.

This article explores the significance of safeguarding dental nurses' safe spaces in social media groups and proposes strategies to uphold their sanctity within the digital landscape. For the purpose of this article, the author will be focusing on Facebook as this is where most dental nurses' groups appear to exist.

A virtual haven

Facebook and other social media platforms offer a virtual haven for dental nurses,

providing a platform for networking, professional development, and peer support. Within these dedicated groups and communities, dental nurses can engage in discussions, seek advice on clinical scenarios, and share experiences in a supportive environment. These virtual safe spaces foster camaraderie, empower dental nurses to voice concerns, and facilitate continuous learning beyond the confines of traditional practice settings.

Despite the benefits they offer, social media groups for dental nurses face unique challenges that jeopardise their effectiveness as safe spaces. One of the most pressing issues is the infiltration of these groups by other dental professionals, including dentists. While interdisciplinary collaboration is valuable, the presence of non-dental nursing members can dilute the focus of discussions and compromise the sense of security and confidentiality within these spaces. The responses that some of these individuals give also have the potential to be read as curt or

Author information

¹Rebecca Silver FdSc MSc RDN FBADN is a multi-award-winning dental nurse and regular writer for *BDJ Team*. She has worked within the NHS and private dentistry and with numerous dental specialists. She has obtained post-qualification certificates in Oral Health Education and Conscious Sedation and an MSc in Advanced and Specialist Healthcare (Applied Dental Professional Practice).

sarcastic, often making the poster feel stupid or dumb for even thinking about asking these types of questions.

The encroachment of social media groups by other dental professionals has significant implications for dental nurses. Firstly, it may deter dental nurses from openly discussing sensitive topics or seeking advice on personal and professional challenges. The fear of judgment or misinterpretation by non-dental nurses can inhibit genuine expression and hinder the supportive dynamics within these virtual communities.

Safeguarding the sanctity

To safeguard the sanctity of social media groups for dental nurses, proactive measures must be implemented:

1. Establish Group Guidelines – Develop clear guidelines and rules for social media groups, outlining their purpose, membership criteria, and expected conduct.
2. Moderation and Oversight – Ensure that moderators or administrators are tasked with monitoring group activity, enforcing guidelines, and addressing any violations promptly. Ensure that moderators are trained to recognise and mitigate potential conflicts while fostering an inclusive and respectful atmosphere within the group.
3. Segmented Discussions – Create designated threads or subgroups within social media groups to cater specifically to dental nursing-related topics. This allows dental nurses to engage in focused discussions without interference from non-dental nursing members, preserving the integrity of their safe spaces.
4. Educational Initiatives – Provide educational resources and training sessions to raise awareness among all members about the importance of maintaining the integrity of social media groups for dental nurses. Foster a culture of mutual respect and collaboration while reinforcing the unique needs and perspectives of nursing professionals.
5. Advocacy and Leadership Support – Encourage professional organisations and leaders within the dental community to advocate for the protection of social media safe spaces for dental nurses. Champion the value of these virtual communities in promoting professional growth, peer support, and knowledge exchange among dental nursing professionals.

It would be hypocritical of the author to not acknowledge that there are Facebook forums for other dental professionals that allow dental nurses to be members as the author is in such groups. However, joining these groups came with a caveat of non-participation and to use the groups as a learning tool only. There are some dental nurses that do respond and comment on these groups, but the author cannot speak on their behalf with regards to that. And even if they do respond, the responses never seem to have the same undercurrent that the influx of non-dental nurses appear to have on their own forums.

fields. They may also be dental nurses but who are also registered under another professional title. But there are times where the responses are not helpful, or they are coming from people who have specialised knowledge in answering the topic. Due to the nature of these comments, posts have the potential to quickly become derailed.

Threatening integrity and efficacy

In conclusion, social media groups have emerged as indispensable safe spaces for dental nurses, offering a virtual platform for collaboration, support, and professional development. However, the encroachment

‘While interdisciplinary collaboration is valuable, the presence of non-dental nursing members can dilute the focus of discussions and compromise the sense of security and confidentiality within these spaces.’

The author also understands that they could be experiencing Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon, the frequency illusion. And maybe there has not been a significant increase in non-dental nursing members, but that they noticed one comment and therefore they believe there has been an exponential increase, but there hasn't.

It may also be the Facebook algorithms themselves; unless you curate your feed then you tend to be at the mercy of the algorithms. If the author has clicked on these posts, then the algorithm may have decided to show more posts and comments like these, as it believed the author enjoys them or has noticed previous interaction.

The author has discussed this with other dental nurses who are members of the same groups, and they have also anecdotally said they also have noticed more non-dental nurses commenting. This is not to discourage all non-dental nurses from joining these groups – as said previously, the author of this article is in different professional groups. And some of these people provide excellent insight and commentary, especially in the specialised

of these spaces by other dental professionals threatens their integrity and efficacy in meeting the unique needs of dental nursing professionals. By implementing proactive measures to preserve the sanctity of social media groups, the dental community can uphold the value of these virtual safe spaces as vital hubs for dental nursing-specific discussions, networking, and peer support. It is imperative to prioritise the protection of these digital sanctuaries to nurture a resilient and empowered community of dental nursing professionals in the digital age.

Rebecca is on the BADN Panel of Reps and will be speaking at the Dental Nurse Forum, British Dental Conference and Dentistry Show this May in Birmingham – on conflict resolution in dental practices and on ‘The crucial partnership: fostering trust between dental colleagues for optimal patient care’. To find out more about the event and to register visit <https://birmingham.dentistryshow.co.uk/>.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-024-2626-y>