

BY EMAIL

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National Guardian's Office  
Care Quality Commission

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Hi Gavin,

Thanks for sending through a copy of the 'National Guardian Social Media Handbook' as requested.

I was concerned to see that it is National Guardian policy to take discussions about 'negative comments' offline:

*"We use a three-step traffic light system when responding to a negative comment.*

*1. We will send a response that shows we're compassionate, informative and accessible.*

***2. If they continue, we will then offer to take it offline.***

*3. Anyone repeatedly engaging with us using abusive language or content after will be muted, blocked and in severe cases reported to Twitter where appropriate."*

<https://minhalexander.com/2018/01/31/the-national-freedom-to-speak-up-guardians-social-media-policy/>

Critical comments can be justified and useful, and if so, I see no reason why they should not be openly discussed.

Indeed, if the National Guardian's Office seeks to be an exemplar of good whistleblowing governance, modelling mature and positive behaviour in response to critical feedback is surely a basic requirement for the Office.

I wonder if:

1) The National Guardian's Social Media Handbook could be amended so that:

- A more specific definition is given of the type of 'negative comments' that the Office will seek to take offline, so that it is clear that some critical comments *can* be discussed in public
- An explicit statement is added to the policy to the effect that the National Guardian's office will seek to model good governance in responding to critical feedback and accepts in principle that some criticism may be well founded
- The Office as a reflection of its independence does *not* as a matter of policy support the campaigns of other arms length bodies, and that it only specifically supports initiatives that may promote transparency and greater protection for whistleblowers.

I ask because it is currently stated in the handbook:

*"We will seek to use Twitter to further our engagement and communication activities, including....Working collaboratively with other ALBs and **supporting their campaigns**"*

I also ask, again with respect to maintaining the Office's strict independence, that the Office does not make claims that any initiatives are changing culture without evidence from rigorous, independent evaluation.

To give an example, I feel that the National Guardian's Office should not have tweeted:

*"Dr Hughes attended the #WRES SAG meeting with @yvonnecoghill1 and @dianabelfon to learn about how the @WRES\_Team are changing the culture for #BME staff in the #NHS."*

This is because this tweet stated as fact that the WRES team is changing culture. Many BME staff feel that the WRES programme is *not* making an appreciable difference.

The current strength of feeling about the prosecution and striking off of a junior, female BME doctor is a testament to great uneasiness about serious, persisting racism in the NHS.

It is insensitive of white dominated NHS leadership to distribute cheerful messages that culture is changing in the face of such events.

2) I ask that the National Guardian publishes all her internal policies, including her (hopefully amended) National Guardian Social Policy Handbook. This would be helpful in setting an example on transparency.

Best wishes,

Dr Minh Alexander

cc Dr Henrietta Hughes, CQC National Freedom To Speak Guardian  
Sir Robert Francis, CQC NED and Chair of National Guardian's  
Accountability and Liaison Board