

The infatuated patients stalking GPs on Facebook: Number of doctors seeking help for unwanted advances rises by a third

- **Patients are increasingly turning to Facebook to flirt with and harass medical professionals the Medical Defence Union has warned**
- **In the worst cases police are being called in and injunctions taken out**

By Daily Mail

Lovesick patients are increasingly using Facebook to flirt with, proposition and harass their doctors.

The number of medics seeking help to deal with unwanted advances has risen by a **third** as technology, including emails and text messages, erodes boundaries and makes contact easier, the Medical Defence Union has warned.

It said that although some flirtations quickly fizzle out, in the worst cases the police are called in and injunctions taken out to stop doctors from being stalked or harassed.

The number of medics seeking help to deal with unwanted advances has risen by a third (file picture)

Medics are even finding themselves in danger of being struck off after being falsely accused of having a relationship with a patient who is infatuated with them.

Dr Claire Macaulay, of the MDU, which provides legal advice and insurance to doctors, said: 'The trend towards patients making unsolicited advances to their doctor is not a new one.

'But while in the past patients were likely to put pen to paper when making such approaches, patients are now using digital means.

Our members report that being bombarded with messages to their mobiles or email, Twitter or Facebook accounts can, in some ways, be even more intrusive than receiving a stream of written letters.'

In one case, a male GP began to receive letters and gifts from a patient with mental health problems.

The woman was told the contact was inappropriate but continued to send letters and also sent repeated friend requests on Facebook.

Although some flirtations are said to quickly fizzle out, in the worst cases police are being called and injunctions taken out (file picture)

After her care was transferred to another doctor in the practice, she told the General Medical Council she had had a sexual relationship with the first GP.

The doctor denied this and was cleared of any wrongdoing – but only after a six-month investigation.

In another example, a female GP was asked out for a drink by a male patient as she left her surgery.

When she declined, the patient pestered her via Facebook, and sent her lilies, after reading on the site that they were her favourite flower.

On the MDU's advice, the doctor changed the security and privacy settings on the site, so that only a few chosen friends could see the information she had posted.

Another doctor brought charges after being sent lingerie catalogues and stalked by an ex-patient.

Lovesick patients are increasingly using Facebook to flirt with their GP (picture posed by a model)

Between 2002 and 2006, the MDU, Britain's biggest insurer of GPs, received 73 requests for help in dealing with unwanted advances. This rose to 100 from 2007 to 2011.

Seventy-two of the 100 cases involved GPs, the others were hospital doctors including psychiatrists and gynaecologists. Almost three-quarters of those being pursued and propositioned were male.

Doctors are advised not to respond to advances made through social networking sites. If the problem continues, the patient's care can be transferred to a colleague.

Other advice includes withholding mobile numbers when calling patients and exercising caution before accepting gifts.

Dr Clare Gerada, of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said patients can sometimes mistake doctors' professional care for personal interest.

'Patients see doctors when they are vulnerable, and doctors are trained to maintain professional boundaries at all times,' she said.

'In some cases, however, where there may be vulnerable patients who have experienced traumatic events, they might misinterpret their doctor's compassion for something stronger.'