

# Recommended Medical Practice Website Guidelines

## Executive Summary

These guidelines provide a regulator-aligned standard for medical digital assets, including websites, social media platforms, and influencer content. Their purpose is to reduce patient harm and ensure compliance with advertising, consumer protection, and data protection laws across the United Kingdom, European Union, United States, and Middle East.

## 1. Core Principles and Governance

Effective compliance is rooted in truthfulness, substantiation, and transparency. Medical practices must adopt a formal governance and control framework for all digital content.

- **Accountability:** Appoint a named Clinical Accountable Officer responsible for approving clinical safety messaging, and a Compliance Lead responsible for advertising standards and data protection.
- **Approval workflow:** All digital content must undergo documented clinical and compliance review, with final versions preserved through dated PDF signoffs.
- **Audit trails:** Maintain an evidence file for every claim (e.g. randomized controlled trials, device instructions for use) and actively monitor updates from regulators such as the CQC and ASA.

## 2. Content and Advertising Standards

Medical practice websites should function as transparent gateways to care, prioritizing patient safety and informed decision-making over promotion.

- **Identity:** Clearly display the legal entity name, registered address, and clinician registration numbers (e.g. GMC, NMC, HCPC).
- **Balanced messaging:** Present benefits and risks in equal measure and avoid absolute terms such as 'guaranteed', 'risk-free', or 'permanent'.
- **Imagery:** Use only genuine before-and-after images with documented consent, without exaggerating filters or digital manipulation. Images should represent average results.
- **Ethics:** physicians should maintain professional decorum and safeguard the prestige and dignity of the discipline
- **Pricing:** Disclose all mandatory fees at the earliest stage to avoid drip pricing, and clearly state refund and cancellation policies.
- **Endorsements:** Prominently disclose any influencer incentives, affiliate links, sponsorships, or paid partnerships.

### **3. Privacy and Data Protection**

Given the sensitivity of health data, medical websites must apply high standards of information governance and security.

- Information governance: Publish a clear and accessible privacy notice detailing data use, retention periods, and user rights.
- Compliance tools: Conduct Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) for high-risk processing activities and maintain a register of all third-party scripts and tracking technologies.
- Consent management: Implement granular cookie and tracking consent mechanisms, ensuring withdrawal of consent is as easy as giving it.

### **4. Jurisdiction-Specific Requirements**

- United Kingdom: Comply with CQC requirements for displaying ratings and ASA standards for cosmetic intervention marketing.
- European Union: Ensure device-related claims align with MDR/IVDR requirements and govern health data processing in accordance with GDPR.
- United States: Adhere to FTC truth-in-advertising rules and ensure all web forms, portals, and tracking tools are HIPAA-compliant.
- Middle East (UAE): Obtain prior health authority approval for health-related advertising on social media platforms.

### **5. Essential Compliance Checklist**

Medical practices should undertake quarterly audits to verify the following:

- Clinician credentials and scope of practice are current and accurately displayed.
- Claim substantiation packs are complete and available for inspection.
- Clear red-flag signposting (e.g. GP or Emergency Department referral) is present for urgent issues.
- Transparent complaints handling and escalation pathways are documented and accessible.

### **6. Analogy for Understanding**

Navigating medical website compliance is comparable to operating a highly regulated aircraft cockpit: every dial (claim), safety manual (evidence file), and flight path (governance process) must be checked, verified, and documented to ensure a safe journey for every passenger (patient).

## **7. International alignment**

Where relevant, practices should sense-check website content against guidance from international and regional professional bodies (e.g. ISAPS, FILACP, Pan-African Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, Asian Federation of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery Societies, and the Arab Association of Surgical and Medical Aesthetics), without diluting local regulatory compliance.

Professional badges and logos (including the ICOPLAST logo) must be used in a clear, non-misleading manner. Their meaning (e.g. membership, training affiliation, or guideline alignment) must be explicitly stated and must not imply accreditation or endorsement where none exists.

## References

### United Kingdom

- Care Quality Commission (CQC): Guidance on the display of ratings for independent doctors and clinics (updated 26 November 2025).
- Advertising Standards Authority (ASA): Advice on before-and-after photographs (updated 5 June 2025) and beauty and cosmetics guidance (updated 16 September 2025).
- General Medical Council (GMC): Using social media as a medical professional (accessed January 2026).
- Competition and Markets Authority (CMA): Price transparency and unfair commercial practices guidance (accessed January 2026).
- Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners (JCCP): JCCP & CPSA Code of Practice (2023), Ethical Use of Social Media Code (2021), and policy statements on advertising injectable treatments.

### European Union

- European Commission: MDR/IVDR guidance hub (MDCG endorsed documents).
- European Commission: Proposal to amend MDR/IVDR dated 16 December 2025.
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ePrivacy framework.

### United States

- Federal Trade Commission (FTC): Advertising and Marketing Basics and Health Products Compliance Guidance (2022).
- Department of Health & Human Services (HHS): HIPAA guidance on online tracking technologies (updated June 2024).
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA): Requirements for promotion of prescription drugs and medical devices.

### Middle East (UAE/Dubai)

- Dubai Health Authority (DHA): External Circular CIR-2025-00000149 on health advertisement content on social media (dated 23 August 2025).

**Disclaimer**

*The information contained in this document is for general guidance and informational purposes only. It is highly recommended that you consult guidelines from your National/Regional Health Authority.*