

Practice Directive

Social Media

College of Registered Nurses and Midwives of
Prince Edward Island

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Background

The purpose of this practice directive is to help nurses and midwives understand the importance of maintaining professionalism and making informed decisions when using social media. Social media is a term used to reference “online and mobile tools used to share opinions, information, and experiences through written messaging, images, video or audio clips and includes websites and applications used for social networking” (International Nurse Regulator Collaborative, 2016). Some common examples are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, BeReal, Reddit, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube. It also includes email, blogs, discussion forums and message boards. Social media is prevalent in society and is constantly evolving; however, nurses and midwives are expected to adhere to the standards of practice, code of ethics and expectations of professionalism.

This practice directive is not intended to restrict any nurse or midwife’s right to freedom of speech. It is to ensure that nurses and midwives are accountable for their actions on social media and online. They have a responsibility to maintain the public’s trust in their professionalism. It is very important for the nurse or midwife to separate their personal opinions from their professional opinions on social media, especially if they differ.

Benefits

When social media is used appropriately it can be beneficial. Some nurses and midwives may use social media for professional reasons to network and develop new connections and work relationships. It can also be a powerful tool to distribute evidence-based information to clients and their families and to communicate information quickly during an emergency. Social media can also be used to promote the professions of nursing and midwifery and to enhance the reputation of the professions.

Risks

Even though social media use is widespread, there are considerable risks associated with its use, including:

- Private and confidential information about a nurse, midwife, client, or employer can easily and unintentionally be shared.
- Breaches in the Standards of Practice and/or Code of Ethics. This may damage the reputation and public confidence in the profession.
- Allows the spread of inaccurate and non-evidence-based information in a quick manner. An individual may make a decision regarding their own health based on this inaccurate information.
- Blurring of the nurse or midwife’s professional and personal worlds.

Even if the nurse or midwife has strict privacy settings set, information and posts can be shared, re-shared, forwarded, copied and screenshot without their consent or knowledge. Social media posts create a permanent record and cannot be easily deleted. Deleted posts may still exist on search engines and there are limited controls over what happens to the information. This may still happen in closed groups or private chats.

Expectations and Responsibilities

The nurse and midwife are accountable for their own practice, which includes their social media use. Some things to consider are:

- Reflect on the intent and possible consequences of their social media use and online behaviour.
- Remember that the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics still apply to social media use.
- The nurse and midwife should use the same level of professionalism in their online interactions as they do in their face-to-face interactions.
- Nurses and midwives should not offer health-related advice on social media. This includes responding to questions or comments.
- Do not post, repost, transmit, share, or disseminate any information that may potentially violate the client’s confidentiality and privacy. Leaving out personal details when posting does not fully protect client confidentiality, as the client may recognize themselves.
- Do not accept or send “friend” or “follow” requests from current or former clients or their families. This transitions the relationship from professional to personal, which causes boundaries to become blurred and the professional responsibility to become extended.
- The nurse and midwife should be aware of their own privacy settings and know that privacy settings are imperfect. They should review their privacy settings regularly.
- A nurse or midwife who posts anonymously or under a pseudonym is not protected against the possible consequences of breaches in confidentiality.
- Understand that “liking” or “favouriting” someone’s disrespectful comments, photos, or posts is equivalent to agreeing with them. Nurses and midwives should be careful to not inadvertently be drawn into someone else’s inappropriate behaviour.
- Use proper communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace issues, not social media.
- If a colleague or co-worker makes an unprofessional post or comment on social media, the following steps should be considered:
 - Discuss directly with the source.
 - Discuss with a manager or supervisor.
 - File a report to CRNMPEI.

Using social media in a professional role

Social media can be used to share important information to specific populations, clients, and families. If social media use is within the scope of employment, it is important to review and follow employer policies related to social media and professionalism. It is encouraged to keep work related social media activities separate from personal activities and to post from a separate professional account, not a personal one. Any information communicated through social media should be accurate, evidence-based and from a reliable source. Do not speak on behalf of an employer or profession unless authorized to do so. If a workplace mobile device is being used, it is important to ensure it is securely being stored and managed to ensure client confidentiality is maintained.

Considerations for personal social media use

It is recommended for nurses and midwives to not include a professional title or designation initials (eg: RN, RM, NP) on their social media profiles or to refer to their profession by posting a photo, creating a post, or using a filter. When identifying themselves as being a nurse or midwife, a connection is made between personal life and professional life and may cause a blurring of boundaries.

If a nurse or midwife chooses to state where they work or who their employer is, they must be clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the employer or facility. They should also consider using a disclaimer stating the posts are a personal opinion and do not represent those of the profession or employer.

Nurses and midwives should refer to the employer's policies regarding social media use. Even if the employer does not have policies related to the use of social media outside of the workplace, the College of Registered Nurses and Midwives of Prince Edward Island may discipline a registrant if their social media interactions affect the public's confidence in the profession.

It is also important to note that using social media while at work can be viewed as client abandonment. If the nurse or midwife is distracted by social media and fail to notice a change in the client's condition or fail to complete assigned responsibilities, it may be considered client abandonment. Being distracted by notifications, either on a phone, watch, or other device, can affect work efficiency, productivity, and memory.

The Six P's of Social Media Use

The International Nurse Regulator Collaborative (2016) provided suggestions for social media use:

- professional: act professionally at all times
- positive: keep posts positive
- patient/person free: keep posts patient or person free
- protect yourself: protect your professionalism, your reputation and yourself
- privacy: keep your personal and professional life separate; respect privacy of others
- pause before you post: consider implications; avoiding posting in haste or anger

References

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