

YOU'VE ASKED

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what are the implications for Registered Nurses (RN) in relation to the use of Social Media tools?

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) defines the term social media as “a group of Internet-based applications and technologies that allow users to have the same kind of real-time conversation that they might have with friends or neighbours with virtual friends from around the globe. Social media technologies allow users to interact and collaborate with each other online in the creation and sharing of information, ideas and opinion” (CNA, 2012). The Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) does not regulate the use of social media; it does however regulate the practice of registered nurses (RNs) within an environment where social media is ever present.

The following information has been compiled in response to inquiries from registered nurses.

Why is the use of social media an issue?

RNs are legally, professionally and ethically required to maintain a high level of confidentiality, which makes maintaining the separation of one’s personal and professional life essential.

Social media has brought about the possibility of blurring our professional and personal worlds giving rise to potential risks to privacy, confidentiality, reputation, intellectual property and public trust of and confidence in of the nursing profession. When we combine the use of technology with social connections, the line between what we think of as “private” and “public” becomes blurred. Being mindful about your use of social media and understanding the division between your personal freedoms and your profes-

sional obligations is a great place to start. You should also check with your employer to make yourself aware of their policies regarding social media use. It is important to remember that your conversations on social networking sites are not actually private—despite privacy settings—and are easily accessible to others. This means that the utmost caution must be taken with your online conversations/posts to ensure that you do not violate your professional boundaries. A breach of patient privacy and confidentiality could have implications with your employer and the NANB. RNs are held to a high standard of confidentiality with respect to client information. To understand the limits of appropriate use of social media, it is important for RNs to understand the concepts of confidentiality and privacy in the health care context and use NANB’s standards and the Code of Ethics as a guiding framework when making decisions about their use of social media.

What constitutes inappropriate use?

To manage/decrease your professional and personal risks, NANB recommends RNs adhere to the following when using social media tools:

- always follow/ abide by employer policies concerning personal and professional social media tools;
- always protect personal identity;
- always maintain privacy and confidentiality of clients and co-worker’s information and immediately report any breach to

your employer;

- build personal social media competence; know the technology and have the skills and judgment to use it appropriately and ethically;
- always maintain professional nurse-client professional boundaries and avoid engaging in personal social media relationships with clients;
- refrain from posting any client information or image(s) unless it is related to employer expectation for client care;
- never post unprofessional or negative comments about clients, co-workers or employers;
- do not use social media sites to vent or discuss work and refrain from commenting on posts of this nature made by others;
- always maintain a professional manner in postings, photos and/or videos;
- never speak on behalf of a health care organization unless authorized to do so;
- promptly report any identified breach of confidentiality or privacy;
- always keep work-related social media activities separate from personal social media activities;
- create strong passwords and change

them frequently. Do not share passwords with others; and

- avoid offering health-related advice in response to posted comments or questions; if relied upon, such advice could trigger professional liability (CNPS, 2010) and/or a complaint to the NANB.

Could disparaging and negative comments made concerning colleagues on social media sites be considered bullying?

Most definitely. Individuals who make negative comments about a colleague on social media sites may feel there is no harm being done, especially if they think the person in question is not actually able to view the information. Once content is posted online it is easily shared with others and even content that has been deleted is still accessible. Negative comments can be detrimental to the creation of a cohesive health care delivery team and this could result in risks to patient safety.

It is possible that negative online comments may be considered intimidating and bullying, a form of lateral violence. This is often referred to as “cyber bullying”. This type of behavior is cause for concern for both employers and nursing regulators and may result in sanctions against the RN.

I’m sometimes invited to be ‘friends’ with previous patients—and even their family members—when they’re no longer in my care. I don’t want to offend anybody by denying their request, but I also don’t want to do anything that would be considered ‘inappropriate’. Can you clarify what I should do?

It is not uncommon for RNs to be invited to join a former or existing client on a social media site.

The Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) cautions registered nurses to respect and enforce professional boundaries and not to communicate with clients through social networking sites as it may extend the scope of professional responsibility (www.cnps.ca/index.php?page=147).

It is understandable that you may be sensitive about offending someone by denying their *friending* request on social media sites such as Facebook and if you feel as though declining the request could be hurtful to your client, and damaging to the therapeutic relationship, you should have a discussion with the client to indicate why this relationship could be considered inappropriate.

Refraining from engaging with past and present clients on social media is one step towards ensuring that you do not blur personal and professional lines. The Canadian Nurses Association developed in February 2012 an Ethics in

Practice document that also offers information to RNs in relation to “friending” clients using social media tools and your professional association—NANB—has recently published guidelines for the ethical and responsible use of social media available on NANB’s website at www.nanb.nb.ca/index.php/publications/practice.

For more information on the use of social media in relation to nursing practice, contact NANB to speak with a Practice Consultant at 1-800-442-4417 or by email at nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

REFERENCE

- Canadian Nurses Association (2012). Ethics in Practice. *When Private Becomes Public: The Ethical Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media*. Ottawa: Author. www2.cna-aic.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/Ethics_in_Practice_Feb_2012_e.pdf
- Canadian Nurses Association (2008). *The Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*. Ottawa, Author. www.nanb.nb.ca/PDF/practice/CNA Code of Ethics.pdf
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NANB offers a pamphlet on the dos and don'ts of the use of social media technologies to further nursing practice. Please download your copy on NANB's website www.nanb.nb.ca.

Social media technologies allow RNs to interact and collaborate with each other online in the creation and sharing of information, ideas and opinions (CNA, 2012).

Benefits associated with appropriate use of social media

- Strengthening professional relationships
- Providing valuable information to health care recipients
- Providing timely communication with clients and family members
- Educating and informing RNs and nursing students

Risks associated with inappropriate use of social media

- Breaches of patient privacy and confidentiality
- Violation of professional boundaries
- Public's trust of RNs can be compromised
- Employment and regulatory consequences

DO:

- Know your legal and ethical responsibilities to maintain privacy and confidentiality as an RN
- Know the standards and expectations for privacy and confidentiality from the NANB
- Remember to separate personal and professional lives when using social networking sites
- Respect and enforce professional boundaries
- Know your organizational policies and procedures on social networking, privacy and confidentiality
- Remember that words written on social networking sites have the potential to live on forever
- Respect client privacy and protect your own
- Create strong passwords and change them frequently
- Manage your virtual image

DON'T

- Post/share confidential information; an unnamed patient or person may be identifiable from posted information
- Use social media to vent or discuss work-related events
- Upload pictures or videos of yourself in a clinical setting
- Make disparaging or embarrassing remarks about your organization, its patients/clients/residents, or fellow employees
- Offer health-related advice in response to comments or questions posted on social media sites
- Use social networking sites when you are supposed to be working
- Speak on behalf of a health care organization unless authorized to do so
- Allow your use of social media to interfere with your work commitment

Reference:
NANB (2012). Ethical and Responsible Use of Social Media: Guidelines. Fredericton, NB: Author

For More Information
Call: 1-800-442-4417
Website: www.nanb.nb.ca

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NANB Supports Practice
**Ethical and Responsible
Use of Social Media
Technologies**

Nurses Association
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