



Fact Sheet - Social Media

Scenario: “Eric’s profile on his Twitter account identifies him as a registered nurse (RN) working at one of the local hospitals. In responding from home to a tweet on the weekend, Eric posts multiple derogatory comments about his workplace which are retweeted by others. A member of the public, shocked and worried about the truthfulness of these comments decides to call the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) to inquire about lodging a complaint for “unprofessional online comments”.

More and more, communication using social media is being “followed”, “retweeted”, commented upon and shared sometimes beyond the intended audience. This growing appetite for newsworthy “chatting” highlights the need for RNs and nurse practitioners (NP) to be very vigilant when using social media platforms for communication.

The Canadian Nurses Association (2012) defines the term social media as “a group of Internet-based applications and technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Social media includes but is not limited to social networking, online forums, chat rooms, texting/instant messaging, blogs, wikis, file sharing (video and audio) and virtual worlds”.

Social media in its many different forms, has become very easy to use and a preferred means for communicating with family and friends. While you may think using social media tools for these purposes is your “personal business”, you must be aware that the sharing of information, opinions and photos through these means can easily cross boundaries and therefore have a negative impact on your professional image and the nursing profession.

The NANB does not regulate the use of social media; it does however regulate the practice of RNs and NPs within an environment where social media is ever present. The *Nurses Act* states that RNs and NPs are accountable to the profession and for any “conduct unbecoming of a member including any conduct that might adversely affect the standing or good name of the practice of nursing or the Association” (NANB, 2002). This expectation applies to all RNs and NPs and can include conduct that occur outside the “work time” or practice setting.

When using social media, RNs and NPs are responsible for their actions and comments and accountable not only to their client, but also to their employer, the profession they represent and the public they serve. To use social media and other information sharing technology responsibly, consider these tips/ pointers:

- build your own social media competence, know the legislation and the technology and have the skills and judgment to use it appropriately and ethically;
- do not offer any health-related advice in response to questions or comments on social media;
- abstain from making disparaging remarks about employer or co-workers (e.g., threatening, harassing, profane, obscene, sexually explicit, racially derogatory, homophobic, or other offensive comments);



- always maintain professional nurse-client boundaries and avoid engaging in personal social media relationships with clients;
- be aware of and follow workplace policies concerning the use of personal or work issued social media tools when at work, including how to manage a privacy breach;
- do not post content or otherwise speak on behalf of the employer unless authorized to do so, following all applicable employer policies; and
- reflect on why, how and when you use social media and help others do the same; use professional judgment to keep your obligations to clients, colleagues and employers front and center (International Nurse Regulators Collaborative, 2016).

Understanding the risks involved in using social media and other information sharing technology may prevent potential adverse personal and professional consequences (NANB, 2017).

For more information about the use of social media tools in relation to RN's and NP's responsibilities, contact NANB at 1-800-442-4417 or by email at nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

Did you know?

"In February 2015, Nurse S. – a registered nurse (RN) working in Saskatchewan - posted comments on her Facebook page and on Twitter criticizing the end-of-life care her grandfather received at a healthcare facility. She questioned the competence of the staff and identified the facility in her posts. She also questioned the compassion of those in the healthcare profession and whether the staff cared about their residents/patients. Nurse S. posted "As an RN and avid healthcare advocate myself, I just HAVE to speak up". The facility filed a complaint to the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, which concluded the conduct of Nurses S. was subject to discipline.

Nurse S. was ordered by the Discipline Committee to:

- *Review the Standards as well as the Code of Ethics and submit a self-reflective essay referencing each of these publications within two months of the decision;*
- *Complete the Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics online learning module within two months of the decision;*
- *Pay a fine of \$1,000 for general deterrence;*
- *Pay \$25, 000 toward the costs of the proceedings"*

(Maciura & Wade, 2019)



Resources

[Ask a lawyer: Social Media](#) Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS)

[Social Media in Professional Practice](#) (CNPS)

[Social Media](#) (CNPS)

[Practice Guideline for Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media and Information Sharing Technologies](#) (NANB)

References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2012). *Ethics in Practice. When Private Becomes Public: The Ethical Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media*. Ottawa: Author.

International Nurse Regulators Collaborative. (2016). *Position Statement. Social Media Use: Common Expectations for Nurses*. Ontario: Author.

Maciura, J., & Wade, A. (2019). How Off-Duty Use of Social Media May Lead to Professional Discipline. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 9(4), 31-33.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2002). *Nurses Act*. Fredericton: Author.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2017). *Practice Guideline for Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media and Information Sharing Technologies*. Fredericton: Author.