



# Social Media

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## Introduction

This resource provides guidance and recommendations for Registered Nurses (RN), Registered Nurses with Additional Authorized Practice [RN(AAP)] and Nurse Practitioners (NP) in Saskatchewan for responsible, safe and appropriate use of social media both inside and outside the workplace. RN's use of social media as a tool for advocacy is gaining popularity and effectiveness. This resource is not intended to restrict any nurses' right to freedom of speech. Rather, it guides nurses in the understanding of expectations for appropriate use of social media (INRC, 2016). Within the professional realm of nursing, appropriate use may include, but is not limited to posting scientifically based, evidence informed topics.

Social media refers to the growing number and types of platforms, websites and online tools that facilitate online connectivity and communication with others. Some common examples being used today include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, blogs, LinkedIn, texting, online community forums and various associated applications.

## Professional Obligations

This resource, related to the use of social media, draws on expectations of practice included in the current *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*, the *CRNS Registered Nurse Practice Standards* and *Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies*. While there are no new expectations for practice in this resource, nurses have the responsibility and obligation to be aware of, to understand and to adhere to existing expectations when using social media. It is the responsibility of all practitioners to maintain a professional standard when using social media.

## Benefits and Risks

RNs are aware of the benefits and risks of social media. They build competence and understanding in how to use the technology and have the skills and judgment to use it appropriately and ethically. RNs are aware of social media's evolving culture and changing technology. Social media is a powerful platform that is being used in many positive ways (i.e. advocacy) by nurses for both personal and public use. RNs always pause to reflect on the intent of online behavior and critically examine the possible consequences of their messaging before they blog, post or tweet.

## Professional Image

RNs use the same level of professionalism in their online interactions as they do in face-to-face communications. Anything posted online becomes public information and will remain online indefinitely. There are limited controls over how posts can be forwarded, copied or reposted by others even in closed groups, chats, etc.

RNs think about who can see what they are sharing. Employers, clients and colleagues can view postings. It is common for others such as employers to search social media to find information about employees. RNs know the importance of carefully considering what comments, photos, profiles or related posts are on their social media sites and how these reflect their image as a professional nurse and impact the perception of others.

## Confidentiality

A central concern for nurses who use social media is the risk to confidentiality. Nurses have an accountability to maintain ethical and legal obligations for upholding their client's confidentiality through their posts and by securing mobile devices that may contain sensitive information. They do not share any client information on social media sites. Leaving out what may be considered to be personal details when posting information or images does not protect client confidentiality. A breach of this standard can damage the nurse-client relationship and impact trustworthiness of the nursing profession and the health care organizations where the nurse is employed (CNPS, 2012). Nurses know their obligation to report confidentiality breaches to the appropriate person(s) within their agency/employer.

## Privacy

RNs set and maintain privacy settings to limit access to their personal information. They are aware of their privacy settings and know that even if they use the highest privacy settings, others can copy and share their information without the RN's knowledge or permission. Nurses read, understand and apply the most appropriate privacy settings. They are aware that privacy settings are imperfect, can be compromised and that they may change over time. Nurses follow privacy legislation and respect the privacy of colleagues, clients and the confidential business of their employer(s).

## Boundaries

Nurses are legally bound to maintain appropriate boundaries as they would when communicating by any other method. Accepting friend requests from past or present clients can transition the relationship from professional to personal, causing boundaries to become blurred and the scope of professional responsibility to become extended (CNPS, 2012). It is appropriate for nurses to indicate that they cannot accept a mix of personal and professional relationships.

## Expectations

RNs use caution when identifying themselves as a nurse online. If they do so, others may ask for advice, which, if given, can lead to a nurse-client relationship. Using a name that hides their identity does not release them from their obligation to maintain professional boundaries. Nurses know this and practice accordingly. If they choose to identify where they work or who their employer is, they must be clear that they are not speaking on behalf of that employer.

## Integrity

Nurses protect the integrity of the nursing profession and their own professional integrity. RNs use proper communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace issues – not social media – and refer to colleagues or clients online with the same level of respect used in the workplace. Before posting information about their practice, RNs reflect on their intentions and the possible consequences, understanding that “liking” someone's comments indicates support of the comment.

## Employer Policies

RNs know and follow employer policies on using social media, photography, computers and mobile devices, including personal devices at work. If they communicate with clients via social media, nurses work with their employer to develop policies. Nurses use social media accounts that are specific to their workplace. Nurses do not use personal devices for work purposes except where allowed by employer policy.

## Accountability

Nurses make sure they can answer for their actions. They reflect on why, how and when they use social media and support others to do the same. Use of social media must not interfere with the nurse's professional work obligations. They know that personal use of social media while working can be viewed as client abandonment should they become distracted and fail to notice a change in the client's health status or fail to complete assigned responsibilities. If a nurse is unable to discuss their online behavior with others, consider this a red flag. Nurses use their professional judgment to keep their obligations to clients, colleagues and employers front and centre.

## Six 'P's of Social Media Use

- Professional: remain professional at all times
- Positive: keep posts positive. Express contrary/opposing opinions without being disrespectful
- 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 the privacy of others
- Pause before you post: consider implications; avoid posting in haste or anger

Registered Nurses' use of social media is expanding in personal and professional lives as electronic forms of communication become more embedded in our culture and everyday life. It is possible to balance advocacy and engagement while at the same time adhering to the practice standards and the code of ethics.

## References

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