

Social Media Resource

DRAFT

Introduction

This resource provides guidance and recommendations for all registrants of the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRNS). This includes Graduate Nurses (GN), Registered Nurses (RN), Registered Nurses with Additional Authorized Practice [RN(AAP)], Graduate Nurse Practitioners (GNP) and Nurse Practitioners (NP). Professional practice standards regarding confidentiality, therapeutic boundaries, and professional image are engaged when nurses use social media in connection with their professional activities or in a manner that may affect their professional reputation. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance that supports critical thinking and decision-making in the responsible use of social media.

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 include Facebook, X (formally known as 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 [CRNS Code of Conduct](#), [Registered Nurse Practice Standards](#) and [Registered Nurse Entry-Level Competencies](#). Registrants are expected to comply with these foundational documents, along with any other relevant CRNS documents, Federal and/or Provincial legislation, and employer policies as they pertain to their unique context and situation. For registrants engaged in Independent Practice or who promote nursing services online, additional guidance can be found in the [Self-Employed Practice Guideline](#) regarding advertising and endorsement. Registrants engaged in Aesthetic Nursing should refer to the [Aesthetic Nursing Resource](#).

Social media is a powerful platform that is being used in many positive ways (i.e., advocacy, networking, sharing evidence-informed information) by registrants for both personal and public use. Registrants must be aware of the evolving culture of social media and advances in technology. They must develop the competence, understanding, judgment, and skills necessary to use these technologies appropriately, ethically, and professionally. Before blogging, posting or

commenting online, registrants should pause to reflect on the intent of their online behavior and critically consider the potential consequences of their messaging.

Registrants are expected to always demonstrate professionalism, including in personal online spaces, where they may be identifiable as a GN, RN, RN(AAP) GNP or NP. Registrants must ensure information shared is accurate, evidence-informed, within scope, and does not contribute to misinformation or public harm. Online conduct that undermines public trust, compromises client safety or reflects unprofessional behavior may be considered professional misconduct and could result in disciplinary action by the CRNS.

Professional Image

Registrants 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 can remain online indefinitely. There are limited controls over how posts can be forwarded, copied or reposted by others, even in closed groups, chats, etc.

Registrants recognize that information shared on social media carries inherent risk, including how it may be interpreted by the public, current or potential employers, or colleagues. Because registrants have limited ability to assess how content will be perceived, they should remain mindful of this risk and take steps to prevent or address potential misinterpretation. Whenever registrants intentionally or unintentionally identify themselves as nurses or may reasonably be perceived as acting in a professional capacity, they must carefully consider how their communications may be interpreted and the potential impact on their professional image and the image of the nursing profession.

Confidentiality

A central concern for registrants who use social media is the risk to confidentiality. Registrants must maintain ethical and legal obligations for upholding their clients' 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 personal details when posting information or images does not protect client confidentiality. A privacy breach can damage the nurse-client relationship and impact the trustworthiness of the nursing profession and the health care organization where the nurse is employed. Registrants know their obligation to report confidentiality breaches to the appropriate person(s) within their agency/employer.

Privacy

Registrants understand, set and maintain privacy settings to limit access to their personal information. They are aware of privacy setting options and utilize them to mitigate risk, understanding that even the highest privacy settings may still allow others to copy and share information without their knowledge or permission. Registrants are aware that privacy settings

are imperfect, can be compromised and that they may change over time. They follow privacy legislation and respect the privacy of colleagues, clients and the confidential business of their employer(s).

Boundaries

Registrants 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. Most health authorities and employers have policy regarding social media use. Even where there is no clear policy prohibiting the practice, registrants should consider declining “friend” requests from current or former patients, as communicating with clients through social media sites may extend the scope of professional responsibility. An additional resource registrants may wish to access regarding boundaries is the CRNS [*Professional Boundary Considerations for Nurse-Client Relationships*](#).

Expectations

Registrants use caution when identifying themselves by their professional role and title 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. Registrants 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

Registrants protect the integrity of the nursing profession and their own professional integrity. They avoid profanity, discrimination and bullying, and adhere to professional conduct. Registrants 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, registrants reflect on their intentions and the possible consequences, ensuring that the information shared is truthful, evidence-informed and not misleading.

Employer Policies

Registrants 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, registrants work with their employer to develop policies and use social media accounts that are specific to their workplace. Registrants do not use personal devices for work purposes except where/when authorized by employer policy.

Accountability

Registrants are accountable and accept responsibility for their own actions and decisions. 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 registrant'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. Registrants use their professional judgment and seek guidance when appropriate to maintain professional expectations and adhere to relevant employer policies.

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

Registrants 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 conduct.

Summary

All registrants, regardless of practice setting, are accountable to the CRNS *Code of Conduct, Practice Standards, Entry-Level Competencies* and all other relevant regulatory guidance and legislation. The use of social media can be a positive tool when used safely and appropriately. It can enable professional networking, combat misinformation, foster public awareness and engagement, and allow registrants to connect with a professional community and the public.

Registrants use professional judgement when posting online and consider the following:

Think Before You Post

- Could this breach confidentiality?
- Could a client be identified?
- Is this respectful and professional?
- Is this accurate and evidence-informed?
- Could this harm public trust?
- Would I be comfortable if my employer or regulatory body viewed it?

Do

- Share accurate, evidence-informed information

- Use social media for education and advocacy
- Communicate respectfully
- Pause before posting

Do Not

- Share client information or post about clients
- Post workplace frustrations
- Engage in disrespectful behavior
- Spread misinformation

High Risk Situations

- Sharing health opinions
- Engaging in online conflict
- Discussing workplace issues
- Blurring professional boundaries with clients online

When In Doubt

- Pause - Reflect - Do not post - Seek guidance

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