



Social Media and Social Networking

Five Critical Questions to Pause Before you Post:

1. Will this post affect my professional reputation or livelihood?
2. Am I reacting to someone else's post?
3. Is the information accurate, verifiable and the best available research?
4. Am I breaching *PHIA* or any privacy laws?
5. What are my reasons for sharing details about a client's story or image on social media?

The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba and the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba recognize the advancement of social media and the use of social networking sites by registered nurses (RNs) and registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) in today's practice environments. This document addresses specific issues surrounding social media, social networking and professional conduct both in your practice setting and your personal life. It serves to remind nurses of the expectations related to upholding the practice expectations and code of ethics. These expectations can extend to or be challenged by the online environment in situations where nurses use social media or social networking.

The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* and the practice direction *Practice Expectations for RNs* and the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* are documents that outline expected practices and behaviours for RNs and RPNs. Social media and social networking can be seen to expand a nurse's practice area but there may be instances where personal posts and online communication outside of the practice area can become a professional issue. You should be very concerned with protecting the rights to privacy and confidentiality of the client and upholding the image of the profession.

Upholding Standards

The *Code of Ethics* and practice expectations highlight the requirements of maintaining client confidentiality and privacy at all times both in-person and online. While Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram are popular sites for social networking, the practice expectations and code of ethics can be applied to all types of online communication, including personal websites, blogs, email sharing, discussion boards and instant messaging. This means that conduct online and in-person would be judged and examined in the same way and held to the same standard. For example, posting a message online that is intended to mock a co-worker would carry the same consequences as posting a printed message in the workplace.

Conduct Outside of the Workplace

Although employers may not have policies that speak to the use of social media outside of the workplace, regulatory organizations will consider situations that fall outside the practice area if a nurse's conduct could undermine the public's confidence in the profession. Listed below are a number of examples of behaviour that may be investigated by the nursing regulator. The list is not exhaustive but points out some of the situations which could occur. In addition, some of these examples could be violations of the law.

- Sharing confidential information online;
- Posting any comments or blogs about clients, co-workers or colleagues (e.g. identifying a client by name, nickname, diagnosis or room number);
- Distributing sexually explicit material;
- Pursuing personal relationships with clients or service users;
- Using social networking sites to bully and/or intimidate clients, colleagues or co-workers; or
- Engaging in any other behaviour that is interpreted as a breach in the practice expectations or code of ethics.

It is imperative that you conduct yourself in a manner that is professional and protects the confidence of your clients. You should always consider the risks of using social media and social networking sites and the potential impact this may have on your clients.

Social Media and Advertising

RNs and RPNs are diversifying their practice more than ever by entering business arrangements and independent practice settings. Operating a business often involves posting advertisements on social media sights or public forums which can pose a risk. Advertisements must be true, accurate, and verifiable. This means that the RN or RPN must be able to prove that the information in the advertisement is accurate from a reliable source based on best-available evidence. Advertisements must not mislead and must also be easy for clients to understand.

“What do I do if I come across a post/ad from a colleague that I feel is inappropriate?”

RNs and RPNs are encouraged to follow a step-by-step approach to addressing unprofessional behaviour of others. There are a variety of options that the nurse should consider when seeing unprofessional posts or advertisements posted by other nursing colleagues:

- Discuss the inappropriate post of advertisement directly with the source. This is often the first step nurses can take when addressing the professionalism of colleagues.
- Discuss with a manager or director or trusted colleague.
- File a report to the College(s). Information about this process can be found here:
 - CRPNM: <https://crpnm.mb.ca/employers/making-a-complaint/rpns/>
 - CRNM: <https://www.crnmb.ca/public/complaints-process/make-a-complaint/>
- Discuss with a practice consultant. The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba and College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba have practice consultants available to discuss issues in practice. practice@crnm.mb.ca or crpnm@crpnm.mb.ca
- Consider the advertisement/information from a client’s perspective; ask yourself if the advertisement is misleading, unethical and or contains confusing educational material, and if yes, then chances are you ought to bring it forward.

Resources

(available from www.cnps.ca)

- *infoLAW: Social Media*

(available from www.crnmb.ca and www.crpnm.mb.ca)

- *Social Media: Implications for Professional Practice: Avoiding the Collision Between Your Personal & Professional Life*