



Social Media and Professional Registered Nursing: Can the Two Mix?

Social media has quickly made its entrance as a mainstream communication channel where information is shared and relationships can be formed.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Google+, blogging and YouTube are only a few of the different types of social media available to the public.

There has been so much development in this area that the list continues to grow. The opportunity to connect with others to ‘chat’ about any topic imaginable is only a few keyboard strikes away. This kind of connection can be beneficial when used with discretion. As RNs/RN(NP)s we need to use the highest level of discretion when engaging in social media to protect our clients and ourselves.

The immediacy of social media creates an environment where ‘doing before thinking’ can occur. Providing medical advice in a quick reply to a ‘friend’ who is ill; ranting about your co-worker after a tough day at work; and posting a photo of your client are all examples of a lack of discretion when using social media. Prior to taking action, think twice about the information being posted. If there is doubt about the appropriateness of the message, do not post it.

The following suggestions are offered to help RNs/RN(NP)s discern what is appropriate when engaging in social media and to avoid problematic situations.

Privacy and confidentiality

- RN/RN(NP) ethical and legal responsibilities to maintain client privacy and confidentiality dictate professional standards and code of ethics and provincial health information protection legislation. These responsibilities apply in all situations and interactions where clients are involved.
- RNs/RN(NP)s should treat the virtual world of social media with the same professionalism as shown in the physical world. If you would not say something about a client in an elevator then avoid posting that same information in cyber world. Confidential client information should not be posted. Even an unnamed client can be identified if confidential information is disclosed.
- Personal cell phones should never be used to take work-related

photos of clients. Employers have policies relating to photography and these should be adhered to.

- Any breaches of client privacy or confidentiality by colleagues or yourself should be reported promptly.

Personal and Professional Boundaries

- Establish professional boundaries for your virtual relationships as you would in a face-to-face relationship.
- It is best to avoid accepting ‘friend’ requests from past or present clients or family members of clients. Crossing over from a professional relationship to a personal one through electronic means can cause the boundaries of your relationship to become blurred and professional responsibilities may be extended.
- Have a plan for how you will respond to ‘friend’ requests from clients.
- RNs/RN(NP)s who provide

health-related advice on social media sites could be held professionally liable for that advice. This practice should be avoided.

Respectful Communication and Professional Image

- Avoid disparaging comments about your clients, students, co-workers or employer.
- Address conflict with co-workers through proper conflict resolution processes as outlined in employer policy. Do not address via social media avenues.
- Avoid negative comments about your employer or place of work as this can lead to public mistrust in the organization.
- If you are identifying yourself as a RN/RN(NP), maintain the integrity of the profession of registered nursing by ensuring photos, videos and comments are respectful.

- Use social media in a competent manner. Self-directed, online or community based courses may be beneficial in understanding privacy settings and how and where your posts are communicated.

In conclusion, RNs/RN(NP)s can engage in social media as long as professional standards are maintained. Establish rules for engagement that are based on professional responsibility to avoid problematic scenarios. For additional information refer to the references used to inform this article. As well as The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) resource video at <https://www.ncsbn.org/2930.htm>.

If you have additional questions about social media and your nursing practice, consult with a SRNA Nursing Practice Advisor at practiceadvice@srna.org or by calling 1-800-667-9945 or 359-4200 in Regina.

References

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