

Section 7:

Social Media

Policy 7.12

Title: General and Professional Use of Social Media

Date approved: August 22, 2022

Date revised:

Date confirmed:

Overview/background:

Social Media: The Line Between Professional and Personal

Social media and its use by physiotherapists has been a subject of renewed discussion. One question seems to re-emerge regularly: is it always clear when someone is posting in a professional capacity versus a personal capacity?

Several years ago, a finding of professional misconduct was made by the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association (SRNA). In addition, the individual was fined \$1,000 and required to pay \$25,000 towards the association's legal costs. The complaint centred on a nurse's Facebook posts criticizing the care her grandfather received in a long-term care facility. The posts were made from the nurse's personal account, but she identified herself as a nurse.

In July 2019, the court upheld a decision and \$100,000 fine by a regulator against a former Halifax chiropractor who made anti-vaccination statements on her personal social media accounts.

In both cases, members were posting and using their professional title and were held to college standards.

Many of us share details about our personal lives on social media, typically we post photos of what we did on the weekend or share our thoughts on local events. Physiotherapists use social media professionally, including: patient education, business promotion, and/or connecting with colleagues. The line between your personal and professional life can sometimes blur. At the end of the day, social media is a public-facing medium and even if you think you're posting exclusively to your friends list, your post can reach a large audience.

When using social media and using your title physiotherapist, follow the same rules that you would for any other form of communication:

1. Maintain professional boundaries with patients
2. Ensure patient privacy
3. Communicate respectfully and professionally

Should a member of the public make a complaint, a physiotherapist could be held accountable for expressing personal views that differ from the professional standards and the College's commitment to maintaining the public interest.

Like other regulators in Canada and globally the NLCP is in the process of developing social media policies and guidelines for registrants.

A few regulators address posts made via personal social media accounts. The College of Physiotherapists of Manitoba states: "When an individual self-identifies as a physiotherapist, he/she is using title and **may be subject to the Standards of the College, even on personal accounts.**"

The College of Physical Therapists of B.C. writes: "**Posting negative comments or inappropriate or offensive material can undermine public trust** of the physical therapy profession and may be considered cyberbullying."

Physiotherapy New Zealand advises, "It's a good idea when online to pretend that what you are saying/doing is **for everyone and forever.**"

Policy:

Registrants are required to act with professionalism, ethical standards and critical thinking in their interactions, whether online or in person.

Registrants are required to apply code of ethics, standards of practice and laws when using social media.

Do not allow the use of social media to impact their professional judgement and critical thinking. As with any other tools, Registrants are accountable for their professional decisions.

Do not offer professional advice on social media; if relied upon, such advice could lead to liability.

Personal, professional and company social media use must adhere to applicable laws. Defamation, including libel and slander, applies to any information shared on social media.

Registrants participating anonymously or using a pseudonym on social media are not protected against the potential of a breach of confidentiality or defamation.

General Guidelines:

- Be honest about who you are and what you do.
- Make it clear that your views are your own.

- Be professional – keep comments positive; contribute to and share constructive discussion.
- Consider your professional standards and codes of ethics when commenting on practice issues or sharing information online.
- Do not discuss client information on social media site.
- It is not acceptable to express profession related grievances on social media or to refer publicly to concerns regarding your past employer, supervisor, colleagues and clients.
- All content posted on social media becomes public, accessible and could be shared immediately. Opinions can remain in circulation online and can spread quickly.

References:

The Ethical Code of Conduct for Physiotherapists—An Axiological Analysis.

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<https://www.mdpi.com/2065834>

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

<https://physiotherapy.ca/ethics-and-professionalism-toolkit/>

Code of Ethical Conduct

<https://physiotherapy.ca/app/uploads/2022/08/code-of-conduct-en.pdf>

Professional Values

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6484957/>

Use of social media by pharmacy professionals

<https://www.ashp.org/-/media/assets/policy-guidelines/docs/statements/use-of-social-media-by-pharmacy-professionals.ashx>