Nurses and Midwives

Guide to Social Media

NURSING SERVICES DIRECTORATE 2017
# Table of Contents

- Introduction 2
- Aim and Objectives 3
- Benefits of social media use 4
- Issues Arising from Social Media Use 5
  - Privacy and Confidentiality 5
  - Professional Boundaries and Integrity 6
- Safety and Care 7
- Concluding Tips for Use of Social Media 8
- The 6 P’s of Social Media Use 9
- Bibliography 10
Introduction

The use of social media is increasing exponentially and provides a significant part of the communication in today’s era. People use them to obtain news, stay connected with family and friends, exchange information and search for new knowledge. However, these valuable tools can pose a number of risks if not properly used.

Social media encompass any electronic tool that enables instantaneous communication, generation and sharing of content across the globe. This trend is different from the traditional internet usage due to its active nature. Nurses and midwives are expected to maintain professional standards at all times. The use of social media can pose a threat to these standards if not properly addressed.

There are many positive professional applications of social media. Nonetheless, nurses and midwives must ensure that their use of social media is compatible with the codes of ethics and scope of practice. The instant posting permitted by social media provides little time for the user to reflect on what is being posted and its future repercussions. This can potentially cause damage to personal integrity, nurse-patient relationship, nurse-colleague relationship, and also current and future employment opportunities.
Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this guide is to focus on the specific issues that pertain to the nursing and midwifery profession. Nurses and midwives are advised to read this guide in conjunction with the Policy on the Use of Social Media in the Public Service¹, Directive no. 5 – Political Participation and Communications with the Media² and any other relevant policies pertaining to social media issued by the respective entities.

It has been written for nurses and midwives in all grades and nursing and midwifery students so that they can:

a. Understand the benefits of social media; and
b. Understand the issues arising from social media use.
c. Refer to guidelines on the professional use of social media

Benefits of Social Media Use

- Social media provides a plethora of information. Nurses and midwives may find this beneficial as it helps them in doing research and in finding evidence based information through the social accounts of journals research centres and health professional education societies. It can also stimulate and encourage continuous professional development. The ease of access to the network through the availability of Smartphones and/or tablets to gather information can assist in facilitating effective patient’s care.

- Social media can be used by nurses and midwives in providing education to patients and families. They can also be a means of promoting continuity of care. This should be done in a professional manner and through a separate professional profile. Nurses and midwives must ensure that they follow the requirements of the policy on the use of social media in public service when using social media on behalf of the public service.

- Another benefit is that nurses and midwives can communicate with other health care professionals and share ideas through blogs and forums. This can be valuable as it helps nurses and midwives to interact with multiple professionals both locally and globally, rather than having a limited group of people.

- Social media can assist in the dissemination of information and promotion of health services available locally.

- Access to social media is relatively cheap and certain data can be obtained for free. This facilitates the possibility for nurses and midwives to continue doing research and to keep up to date so as to provide optimum evidence based patient care.
Issues Arising from Social Media Use

Privacy and Confidentiality

The biggest risk that social media can pose in health care is related to clients’ privacy and confidentiality issues. Nurses and midwives may breach confidential information and disrespect privacy issues if they are not careful about what they write on social media. Although privacy and confidentiality are two distinct features they are nonetheless related. Nurses and midwives must understand that the client’s information is provided to them by virtue of their position. Thus, it is essential that the information is not shared with others who are not directly involved in the clients’ care in order to maintain confidentiality. Any sharing of information beyond that required for the therapeutic care must be accompanied by the client informed consent and / or when legally required. On the other hand, privacy relates to the client’s expectation and their right to be treated with dignity and respect. Our clients must feel confident that their most personal information and basic dignity are always and at all times protected. Trust is the foundation of an effective therapeutic relationship between healthcare professionals and the clients. Violation of the clients’ privacy and confidentiality can jeopardise this trust between patient and nurse/midwife.

It is important that nurses and midwives appreciate the fact that any information shared by client, and his/her family is obtained during a professional relationship and must adhere to the standards of professional practice. Nurses and midwives must be diligent in what they post online and must ensure that they do not breach privacy and confidentiality. Omission of the patient name
and surname may not be enough to protect the client identity. The close proximity (geographically), and the circumstances described may be enough to disclose the client identity.

Nurses and midwives are also obliged to report any breach of privacy and confidentiality that they may notice. This is to safeguard the patient from any potential harm that this may cause.

**Professional Boundaries and Integrity**

Nurses and midwives must consistently respect moral principles and standards. Online posts can lead to threats to the professional boundary, and professional integrity. Whatever is published on social media may reflect on job performance and potential future opportunities. Whilst nurses and midwives are free to use social media in their personal lives, they must also realise that they have a professional identity. Personal and professional identities are neither separate nor entirely merged but are integrated and an action in one’s identity can reflect on the other.

Boundary violations can take place through nurses and midwives’ acceptance of clients to access their profile. This provides patients with information about the nurse/midwife which goes beyond what is normally gained through the normal nurse/midwife – client relationship.

Creating a personal and a public account to separate the two may be a good idea. Nevertheless one must keep in mind that whatever is posted will be public, searchable and retrievable. Nurses and midwives are advised to think and reflect before posting comments irrespective of the account. Public accounts may be a positive means of communicating at a professional level. However, the principles of privacy and confidentiality still need to be upheld.
Safety and Care

An area of concern is the use of social media and its effect on the team. Online posts about other colleagues can impact on the team effectiveness to deliver care and safeguard patient safety. This can be through the posting of comments and/or from a photo or video taken which can be shared via social media to bully colleagues. In addition, liking someone else’s disrespectful comments about co-workers is not much different than making them yourself. If you need to pass a message to your colleagues do not use the social media.
Concluding Tips for Use of Social Media

• At all times, the posts should be respectful and professional manner.

• Social media tools are not the ideal place to share a message you want to send due to possible misinterpretation.

• Use the same level of professionalism in your online posts as you do face to face.

• Be aware that others can copy and share your information without your knowledge or permission.

• Refer to colleagues and clients online using the same level of respect as you would at the workplace.

• Nurses and midwives must make sure that their use of social media is in line with policies, directives and applicable legislation.

• Use of social media during working hours must be done with caution and shall not in any way compromise or negatively impact their productivity, and/or jeopardise in anyway the professional image.

• Before you post anything online remember the 6 Ps of social media use\(^3\): Professional, Positive, Patient Free, Protect yourself, Privacy, and Pause.

\(^3\) International Nurse Regulator collaborative (2014).
The 6 P’s of Social Media Use

- **Professional**: Act Professional at all times
- **Positive**: Keep posts Positive
- **Patient Free**: Keep post Patient or Person free
- **Protect Yourself**: Protect your professionalism, your reputation and yourself
- **Privacy**: Keep your Personal and Professional life separate
- **Pause**: Always Pause, think and reflect before posting anything online

Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), (2014). “Ethics in practice for registered Nurses”. ISSN NUMBER 1480-9990


