



The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, NPs, and RNs unless otherwise stated.

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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



This guideline outlines the nurse's role in using social media. It will help you understand:

- Benefits and risks of social media
- Professional presence
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Professional boundaries
- Organizational policies
- Integrity
- Accountability

Like all practice support tools, use this document in conjunction with the standards of practice and code of ethics for LPNs, RNs and NPs.

What is Social Media?

Social media are the online and mobile tools used to share opinions, information and experiences through written message, images, video or audio clips; and includes websites and applications used for social networking.

Examples of popular social media platforms include, but are not limited to: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, discussion forms and message boards.

Benefits and Risks of Social Media

Social media, when used appropriately, can have many benefits in the delivery of nursing services.

BENEFITS

The benefits are primarily because it can be used to move information to many people quickly and without regard to their geographic locations. For instance, social media can be used to:

- Distribute evidence-informed health information to clients and families
- Host client and family support networks
- Communicate vital information during an emergency
- Facilitate professional connections and mentoring relationships
- Enhance nursing student education in the classroom and clinical areas
- Recruit participants for research studies and facilitate research
- Shape the reputation and credibility of nursing

Like many things, if used inappropriately, social media can pose several risks to clients, nurses and the nursing profession.

RISKS TO CLIENTS

Include:

- Easy access to unqualified medical opinions or non-evidence informed health information
- Breach of privacy or confidentiality

RISKS TO NURSES

Include:

- Misuse of social media (intentional or not) may breach your standards of practice or code of ethics leading to disciplinary or even legal action

- Blurring professional and personal worlds which creates risks to privacy, confidentiality, reputation and intellectual property
- Information and 'posts' can be shared and re-shared without your consent or knowledge even when privacy settings are at the highest level
- Any information or post shared becomes the property of the social media platform and as such may be used (or sold) at their discretion
- Private and confidential information (about you, a client, your employer) can be easily and unintentionally shared
- Social media posts can create a permanent record that cannot easily be deleted. Copies of deleted information may still exist on search engines or in the electronic files of others.

RISKS TO THE PROFESSION

Include:

- Public confidence in the profession can be damaged by the irresponsible posting of individual nurses

Nurse's Responsibilities on Social Media

If you are using social media, there are several strategies you can use to minimize your risk and continue to meet your standards of practice.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE

- Use the same level of professionalism in your online interactions as you do in face-to-face interactions
- Keep work-related social media activities separate from personal social media activities, especially if you use social media in your nursing role
- Do not use your nursing credentials for personal gain
- Do not post about work-related incidents or make unprofessional or negative comments about clients, coworkers or your workplace
- Do not post information that gives the impression you are not able to provide unbiased care
- Separate your personal opinions from nursing opinions, especially if they differ
- Consider not identifying yourself as a nurse in your online profile

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

- Maintain confidentiality and privacy of clients and co-worker's information. A breach of confidentiality or privacy, even inadvertently, can damage the nurse-client relationship and, negatively impact the nursing profession. Privacy can be breached with far less information than you think
- Report confidentiality and privacy breaches immediately to your employer
- Ensure you understand that posting anonymously or under a pseudonym does not protect you against the possible consequences of a breach of confidentiality

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

- Maintain professional boundaries, especially if you are in the dual role of a friend and a nurse. Do not engage in personal social media relationships with current clients and their families. However, if an online friend becomes a client, make sure you do not unintentionally cross boundaries
- Do not post, repost, transmit or disseminate any information that may be reasonably anticipated to violate the client's rights to confidentiality or privacy, or otherwise degrade or embarrass the client

- Do not accept “friend” requests from current or former clients or their families. Connecting in this way could be interpreted as a continuation of the nurse-client relationship or that the client is entitled to access to your services in ways other clients are not
- Do not collect or transmit client related images using your personal device, even with the client’s consent

ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

- Review and follow organizational policies related to the use of personal and professional social media
- Do not speak on behalf of your employer or the profession unless authorized to do so
- Do not conduct professional discussions or communication on social media without clear organizational policies and processes

INTEGRITY AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE NURSING PROFESSION

- Only use organizationally approved communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace issues
- Use caution if you identify yourself as a nurse online, whether in a biography or in a specific post. When you identify yourself as a nurse on social media or use a platform to share nursing information, you immediately create a connection between your personal and professional life and are expected to uphold all professional obligations.
- Do not offer specific health related advice in response to questions or comments as an appropriate therapeutic relationship has not been established

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Recognize that your accountability to the standards of practice, code of ethics and practice guidelines apply to your social media use.
- Work with your manager or employer to develop a social media policy if there is not one available.
- Ensure you understand that inappropriate use of social media, including personal use while working, can result in a complaint to your employer or NSCN. Either of these may result in disciplinary action.

Key Points

- There are benefits and risks to social media use
- You are accountable to know how your employer policy, standards of practice, code of ethics and practice guidelines apply to your social media use
- Maintain professional boundaries while using social media
- Maintain confidentiality and privacy
- It takes less information than you think to violate privacy or confidentiality online
- Your individual online actions can reflect negatively on your employer or the entire nursing profession

Suggested Readings

- [Professional Boundaries and the Nurse-Client Relationship: Guidelines for Nurses](#)
- [Professional Presence Guideline](#)
- Your organizational social media policy

For further information on anything contained within this practice guideline, please contact a NSCN Practice Consultant at practice@nscn.ca.