COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINE

Social Media

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Version:	2.3
Related topic(s):	Advertising and Communication with the Public; Medical Records Documentation; Medical Records Management; Non-sexual Boundary Violations; Photographic, Video and Audio Recording of Patients; Sexual Misconduct

A **professional guideline** reflects a recommended course of action established based on the values, principles and duties of the medical profession. Licensees may exercise reasonable discretion in their decision-making based on the guidance provided.

Preamble

This document is a professional guideline of the Board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia (CPSBC).

Opportunities to interact online are constantly changing as current social media platforms evolve and new platforms become available. The term "social media," for the purposes of this guideline, refers to websites and software programs used for social networking, such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter and blogging sites. It does not include non-public encrypted electronic communication platforms

CPSBC's position

Social media can be used for both personal and professional purposes. Many licensees are now using social media in their practices to interact with colleagues, seek out medical information online, and share content with a broad public audience. CPSBC recognizes that social media platforms may present important opportunities, such as enhancing public education, among other potential benefits.

Whether using social media for personal or professional use, the nature of these platforms, which are highly accessible and informal, raise important questions about the steps licensees should take to uphold their professional, legal, and ethical obligations.

Expectations of professional and ethical conduct are the same whether licensees are interacting in person, or online through social media. When using social media, licensees are expected to comply with all existing professional expectations, including those set out in relevant legislation, applicable health authority policies, codes of ethics and professionalism, and CPSBC standards.

When using social media, licensees should:

- Maintain clear boundaries with patients in accordance with the *Non-sexual Boundary Violations* and *Sexual Misconduct* practice standards.
- Refrain from establishing online connections with patients on personal social media accounts. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to connect with patients, such as when licensees are using social media accounts for professional purposes.
- Exercise caution when posting personal information on social media platforms. Assume content on the internet is public and widely accessible to all.
- Only post identifiable patient information or patient images to social media if the patient has provided consent—even in a closed or private online forum. Treat photos and videos of a patient made in the context of patient care as part of the patient's medical records and abide by the principles set out in the *Medical Records Management* and *Medical Records Documentation* practice standards.
- Read, understand, and apply the most appropriate privacy settings to maintain control over access to information. Be aware that privacy settings are imperfect, can be compromised and may change over time.
- Respect the privacy of patients, colleagues, and co-workers by carefully managing information acquired about them from social media. Do not search online sources for private patient, colleague, or co-worker information.

- Maintain professional and respectful communications with colleagues, other members of the health-care team, and the public. Avoid derogatory, defamatory, or culturally insensitive statements and disengage from conversations that are disrespectful in tone and content. Defamatory statements published online (e.g. discrediting another licensee or health-care professional) may result in allegations of libel or slander.
- Be aware that plagiarism, copyright infringement and non-compliance with restrictive licensing agreements, trademarks, or terms of usage can lead to legal action. Always provide credit and links back to original sources when sharing information. Represent credentials accurately and declare conflicts of interest where applicable.
- Be mindful of and remain in compliance with all relevant professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities, including CPSBC standards and guidelines.

Resources

1. College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia [Internet]. October 2018. Professional Standards and Guidelines, Physician Use of Social Media [cited December 21, 2020].
2. College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario [Internet]. Social Media – Appropriate Use by Physicians [cited December 21, 2020].