



Practice directions assist practical nurses in understanding their responsibilities and legal obligations, enabling them to make safe and ethical decisions within their practice. Practical nurses are expected to comply with the information disseminated in practice directions. Failure to do so may result in investigation for misconduct and/or an audit of the nurse's practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide nurses^a, employers and the public with information regarding the professional expectations of CLPNM registrants who engage with others through social media platforms. The goal of this document is to support responsible and ethical social media use by all CLPNM registrants.

In this document, the term social media refers to "online and mobile tools used to share opinions, information and experiences with others through written message, images, video or audio clips; and includes websites and applications used for social networking".¹

Your Online Presence

As a nurse you are responsible for meeting your professional standards at all times. This responsibility applies to your interactions online, just as it does to your interactions in person.

Interacting with others through social media comes with unique risks, however. Social media "blurs the lines between one's personal and professional lives" while offering "instantaneous posting opportunities that allow little time for reflective thought".²

Social media provides easy means to share more information, with more people, than would be ever possible through in-person conversations. This attribute of social media can be used for many positive purposes, but it also means that images or comments posted in haste, and later regretted, can be difficult if not impossible to remove from the public domain.

Privacy settings can mitigate the risk of information being spread more broadly than intended, but even with these settings enabled, posts can be screen captured, saved and disseminated by others. This means that any information posted online, even if quickly deleted, may remain accessible to sources unknown to the person who posted it.

Because of these unique properties of social media, nurses must exercise caution, professional judgment and critical thinking when deciding what to post on social media.

Meeting Your Standards Online

As a nurse, if you choose to engage with others through social media, you must do so in a manner that upholds the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of your profession.

^a In this document, the term nurse includes all three types of CLPNM registrants: licensed practical nurses (LPNs), graduate practical nurses (GPNs), and student practical nurses (SPNs).

Your expectations, as a professional, include:

- respecting the boundaries of the nurse-client relationship,
- protecting your clients' rights to confidentiality and dignity,
- promoting trust and confidence in your profession,
- promoting effective team functioning, and
- remaining aware of your influence as a regulated health care professional.

Maintaining Boundaries

Establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries in the nurse-client relationship is a professional expectation, set out in both the CLPNM Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. This professional expectation is also described, in more detail in the CLPNM's [Practice Direction on Therapeutic Relationships and Professional Boundaries](#).

To maintain appropriate professional boundaries, when using social media platforms:

- Turn on privacy settings. While not an entirely effective means of keeping information out of the public domain, secure social media accounts can help you maintain appropriate boundaries with your clients.
- Do not accept requests from clients, or send requests to your clients, to engage through personal social media accounts.
- Do not seek out client information from their social media accounts. This is both a boundary violation, and if the information were used to inform their health care and collected without the client's knowledge, might be a violation of *The Personal Health Information Act* (PHIA).

Protecting Confidentiality and Dignity

The CLPNM's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics also address the client's right to confidentiality and dignity.

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Maintaining confidentiality is also an obligation under provincial privacy laws, including PHIA.

Failure to uphold these rights, even inadvertently, damages the therapeutic relationship, as well as trust in the profession.

To protect client confidentiality and dignity, when posting online:

- Do not post any information that identifies or that *might* identify a client. Remember that the client might be identifiable, based on the context of what you say, even if their name is withheld.
- Do not post demeaning or disparaging comments about a client, or any comments that could be perceived as harmful, whether or not the client is identified.
- Do not take photos or videos of a client with a personal device, or post photos or videos of a client to a personal social media account, even with consent. The inherent power dynamic between the nurse and client call into question whether consent can be freely given.

Consult your employer's policies for further guidance on this topic.

Maintaining Professionalism

As per the CLPNM Standards of Practice, nurses have an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the public's trust in their profession. This expectation applies both off- and on-line.

Before sharing information, comments, and images over social media, consider the potential impact and ask yourself:

- Can this be taken out of context?
- Can these images or words reflect negatively on me personally and professionally?
- Can these images or words cause someone to lose confidence in my profession?
- Could these images or words be considered a violation of my professional standards in



any other way (e.g., could they be interpreted as discriminatory)?

If you answer 'yes' to any one of these questions, the content is not appropriate and should not be posted.

Maintaining Respect Within the Team

High-quality care requires an interdisciplinary team approach. A well-functioning team is built on mutual respect and appreciation.

Respect can be quickly eroded when one or more members of the team use social media platforms to spread negative comments to, or about, coworkers and employers. Even if such comments are made on personal time, through personal social media accounts, they risk causing dysfunction within a team that can affect client care.

If you have concerns about or a conflict with another member of the team, the best course of action is to apply appropriate conflict resolution skills and to address the conflict outside of the public domain. By doing so, you can help to maintain a respectful professional relationship with your colleagues, which in turn, contributes to better care for your clients and a quality practice environment.

Read more about promoting effective team functioning in the CLPNM's [Practice Direction on Interprofessional Collaboration](#).

Using Your Title

As a nurse, you must also be cautious about the information and opinions you share on social media when identifying yourself in connection with your professional LPN designation. Opinions about health and healthcare matters posted by a nurse, even on a personal account, may be perceived by readers as a professional judgment.

For that reason, nurses are advised not to post information or opinions on social media that

conflict with prevailing evidence or best practice on health care issues. While you are free to hold personal opinions that vary from the norm, keep in mind that the information you post online, particularly when identifying yourself as an LPN or even simply as a "nurse", may be reviewed by your regulatory body and assessed against your profession's standards.

As a nurse, you must also be careful not to offer specific health-related advice in response to questions or comments posed on your personal social media account, remembering that an appropriate therapeutic relationship has not been established and a full assessment has not been conducted.

Duty to Report

The CLPNM's Standards of Practice identify that a nurse must identify, respond to, and report situations of professional misconduct to appropriate authorities. This expectation extends beyond the physical work environment and also applies to online behaviour.

Conclusion

As a nurse, your online presence may affect your clients, your colleagues, and your profession. You must, therefore, use caution when deciding what to post, "like," or share.

Your professional obligations, related to your conduct on social media, apply whether you engage in social media for professional or personal purposes. You are responsible for ensuring that your online conduct meets the standards of your profession, as well as applicable legislation (such as PHIA) and your employer's policies.

By being conscientious and applying good judgment, you can continue to enjoy the benefits social media while meeting your professional obligations.

For More Information

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About the CLPNM

The CLPNM is the governing body for the licensed practical nursing profession in Manitoba. Mandated to govern its members in a manner that serves and protects the public interest, the CLPNM establishes practice requirements for the provision of safe and effective nursing care.

Resources

The following documents were consulted during the development of this practice direction.

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