



College of Licensed Practical  
Nurses of Manitoba



College of  
Registered Nurses  
of Manitoba



THE COLLEGE OF  
REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES OF MANITOBA

## **Navigating PHIA Compliance and Ethical Use of Social Media in Nursing Practice**

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The development of this document is a collaboration between the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba (CLPNM), College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (CRNM) and College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM). The use of the word nurse(s) in the document refers to registrants from all three Colleges.

### **Background**

Nurses hold a fundamental obligation to maintain privacy and confidentiality of personal health information. Privacy is embedded in the specific practice expectations, professional nursing practice standards and the codes of ethics for each of the three nursing professions in Manitoba. Nurses must apply the knowledge, skills, and judgment required to meet their practice expectations. Nurses have an ethical responsibility to respect the interests of clients via the lawful collection, use, access, and disclosure of personal information. They are expected to value privacy, confidentiality and safeguard personal health information obtained in the context of a professional relationship.

### **Social Media and Privacy**

The codes of ethics, professional nursing practice standards and practice expectations highlight the requirements of always maintaining client confidentiality and privacy while both in-person and online. While Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram are popular sites for social networking, the practice expectations, professional nursing practice standards and codes of ethics can be applied to all types of online communication, including personal websites, blogs, email sharing, discussion boards and instant messaging. This means that conduct online and in-person is judged and examined in the same way and held to the same standard. For example, posting a message online that is intended to mock a co-worker would carry the same consequences as posting a printed message in the workplace.

### **Conduct Outside of the Workplace**

Nurses need to consider those policies that speak to the use of social media outside of the workplace as well. If a complaint were to be received about a nurse's conduct online or on social media, the nurse may still be held accountable for their actions if the conduct is deemed to undermine the public's confidence in the nursing profession. Listed below are several examples of behaviour that may be brought forward as a complaint and investigated by the regulator. The list is

not exhaustive but points out some possible situations, some of which could be violations of the professional nursing standards and the law.

- Providing client personal health information to another person to post about online.
- Posting any comments or blogs about clients, coworkers or colleagues (e.g. sharing information publicly that is unique and client-specific enough that the client could reasonably be identified by the reader.)
- Distributing sexually explicit material;
- Pursuing personal relationships with clients or service users;
- Using social networking sites to disparage, bully and/or intimidate clients, colleagues, coworkers, managers or employers; or
- Engaging in any other behaviour that can be interpreted as a potential breach of practice expectations, professional nursing practice standards or the codes of ethics.

Nurses should always consider the risks of using social media and social networking sites and the potential impact this may have on their clients and/or colleagues/coworkers. This should also preserve the client's dignity and control over their own information.

## **How to Advocate in a Professional Manner Using Social Media**

Nurses can be powerful advocates for healthcare issues, client rights, and public health initiatives on public forums. However, it is crucial to ensure that one's actions remain in line with professional nursing practice standards, including practice expectations and the codes of ethics. Below are key steps and guidelines that can help nurses advocate effectively while adhering to these principles:

### **1. Maintain Professionalism and Respect**

- **Avoid Unprofessional Language or Behavior:** Nurses should always maintain a respectful tone, even when expressing strong opinions. Disparaging remarks, inflammatory language, or personal attacks can undermine their credibility and violate professional ethics.
- **Stay True to Nursing Values:** Advocacy should reflect the core nursing values of compassion, respect, and dignity. Nurses should strive to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in their advocacy efforts.
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### **2. Follow Confidentiality and Privacy Guidelines**

- **Respect Client Privacy:** Nurses must adhere to the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) and other privacy regulations. Sharing client-specific information or identifiable details on public forums is unethical and illegal.
- **Avoid Discussing Specific Cases:** When advocating for a particular issue, nurses should focus on broader trends or systemic issues and avoid discussing specific clients, unless those cases are anonymized, aggregated, or generalizable to the public.

### 3. Base Advocacy on Evidence-Based Practice

- **Use Reliable Sources:** Nurses should reference credible, evidence-based sources in their discussions. This can include peer-reviewed research, guidelines from professional organizations, and trusted healthcare institutions.
- **Avoid Spreading Misinformation:** Nurses should ensure that any information shared is factual and scientifically supported. The ethical responsibility to "do no harm" extends to providing accurate health information, especially in forums where misinformation is common.

### 4. Ensure Advocacy is Informed and Relevant

- **Stay Within Scope of Practice:** Advocacy should be grounded in the nurse's expertise and knowledge, ensuring that it remains within the boundaries of nursing practice. Nurses should avoid commenting on topics outside their professional competence (e.g., giving medical advice outside their scope).

### 5. Use Social Media Responsibly

- **Be Cautious with Public Platforms:** Nurses should be aware of the potential consequences of their posts on social media. It is important to separate personal and professional views and ensure that any content shared does not reflect negatively on their practice or professional reputation. This also includes sharing information that could possibly identify a client.
- **Maintain a Clear, Professional Identity:** Nurses can use social media to promote healthcare topics, but they should maintain a distinction between personal and professional online identities. Even if a nurse identifies that these opinions are their own, it does not provide an exemption from adhering to the practice expectations, professional nursing practice standards and the codes of ethics.
- **Seek Organizational Support:** Nurses should check with their employer or professional organization before engaging in advocacy on certain issues, especially if they pertain to workplace policies, controversial topics, or specific healthcare systems.

### 6. Promote Positive Change

- **Advocate for Evidence-Based and Client-Centered Practices:** Nurses should seek to promote policies and changes that directly benefit nursing care and outcomes and advocating for improvements that reflect the needs and rights of clients.
- **Join or Initiate Campaigns:** Nurses can lead or support campaigns that raise awareness about important healthcare issues (e.g., vaccination, mental health awareness, health equity). However, these campaigns should always be guided by ethical principles and facts.
- **Consider Other Platforms for Promoting Change:** Social media can be a powerful communication medium and has many benefits. However, it is not always the best communication medium, as outlined above. Before advocating on social media, consider if another communication medium is more appropriate and more in line with your professional standards.

By adhering to these principles, nurses can advocate on public forums in a way that aligns with the ethical and professional standards of nursing practice while contributing to meaningful dialogue and positive change in healthcare.

#### Resources

- *College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba (CLPNM). (June, 2021). Social media practice direction.*
- *College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (CRNM). (2024, March). Maintaining privacy and confidentiality.*
- *College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (CRNM) & College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM). (2024, June). Social media and social networking.*