



Practice Guideline:

Physician Use of Social Media (2023)

Practice Guidelines are recommendations developed by the College with which members should be familiar and follow whenever and wherever possible and appropriate.

Physician Use of Social Media

Preamble

Social media provides methods for information sharing in both a physician's private and professional life. This guideline is not intended to restrict any physician's freedom of expression. It is intended to guide physicians in the appropriate use of social media to preserve the reputation of the profession, foster a culture of respect, protect patients, and avoid harm to the public.

Definitions

Social Media: web and mobile technologies and practices that people use to search for and share content, opinions, insights, and experiences online.

Practice Guideline

Expectations of professional and ethical conduct are the same whether physicians are interacting in person, or online through social media. The College expects physicians to be vigilant in avoiding online situations which may be harmful to patients or professional colleagues and/or harmful to the reputation of the medical profession.

The College recommends that physicians adhere to the following guidelines for online professionalism:

- Maintain clear boundaries with patients. Consider the appropriateness of establishing personal social media connections with individuals who are your patients. Avoid

communicating with individual patients about their confidential medical information through social media.

- Always maintain the confidentiality of patient information and never post identifiable (or potentially identifiable) patient information or images without the express documented consent of the patient or their substitute decision maker.
- Avoid derogatory, defamatory, or culturally insensitive statements. Avoid posting content that could be viewed as unprofessional, particularly if you have chosen to self-identify as a physician.
- Maintain professional and respectful communications with colleagues.
- When interpreting scientific knowledge to the public, provide opinions consistent with the current and widely accepted views of the profession and clearly indicate when you present an opinion that is contrary to the accepted views of the profession.¹
- Assume content posted on social media platforms could become public and widely accessible.

Acknowledgements

CPSO (2022) Social Media
CPSBC (2022) Social Media
CPSS (2021) Physician Use of Social Media

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¹ CMA Code of Ethics and Professionalism (2018)