

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists issues Advisory Statements to provide guidance to members on practice issues. This Advisory addresses the use of social media, and online networking platforms, while maintaining professional integrity and confidentiality.

Definition of Social Media

There is no single commonly-accepted definition of social media.

“Social media” means the online technologies and practices that are used to share stories, information, opinions, host conversations, and build relationships.

Social media can involve a variety of formats, including text, pictures, video, audio and real-time dialogues.

It includes, but is not exclusive to, such things as social networks, discussion forums, blogs, and podcasts. Examples of current social media channels include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, social media tools do not focus on a specific technology but on a new, more interactive way of using the Internet.

Benefits of social media

Social media tools present exciting opportunities for communication and engagement between physiotherapists and the public. Social media enables interactive communication – the exchange of information, perspective and opinion – among multiple audiences, in an effective and efficient manner. Social media encourages contributions and feedback.

Professional Responsibilities – Integrity

Physiotherapists must consider ethical and professional obligations and maintain professional integrity.

Physiotherapists must consider the inherent risks associated with online activities and the potential for professional discipline if there is breach of privacy or unprofessional content.

Physiotherapists must accurately attribute and give credit to work and ideas of others.

Online activity creates a digital record that is accessible to clients, colleagues, employers, contacts and, potentially, millions of others. Identifying yourself as a physiotherapist creates perceptions and expectations (not only with social media) and professional integrity must be maintained.

Professional Responsibilities - Privacy and Confidentiality

It is paramount that physiotherapists maintain client privacy and confidentiality at all times, regardless of the mechanism used to transmit the message, be it social networking or a verbal conversation.

Do not identify individuals by name or any other personal identifier.

Ensure that photographs do not contain confidential information or images in the background.

Social Media to be Moderated

It would be prudent to moderate blogs, discussion forums or other social media initiated and/or created by, and within the control of a physiotherapist and/or a physiotherapy company.

Moderated means regular technical and monitoring measures that prevent, or ensure the timely removal of, any defamatory or objectionable submissions, including information that jeopardizes the privacy of others.

Personal versus Private Accounts

It would be prudent to maintain a separation between private and professional social media accounts.

Pseudonyms

Many social media tools allow users to remain anonymous by creating a “pseudonym”. Under a pseudonym, individuals can develop an identity, become known to others, develop a following, and establish a reputation. The use of a pseudonym does not make it suitable to post defamatory or objectionable content, or to jeopardize privacy or confidentiality.

Advertising

Advertising, in any form, must meet the advertising guidelines of the Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists. These guidelines include, but are not limited to the following prohibitions:

- No testimonials
- No claims of superiority
- No use of the words “certified in” or “specialist in”, unless approved by the NSCP

Responsibility Framework

When considering whether or not to use social media, here are some points to reflect on:

AIM - I am doing this to achieve the following objective ...

AUDIENCE - I am trying to reach ...

CHANNEL - The best platform to achieve the aim and reach the audience is...

TARGET/TIMELINE – I want to achieve x by y date ...

POLICY – On posting and commenting to promote consistency and professionalism

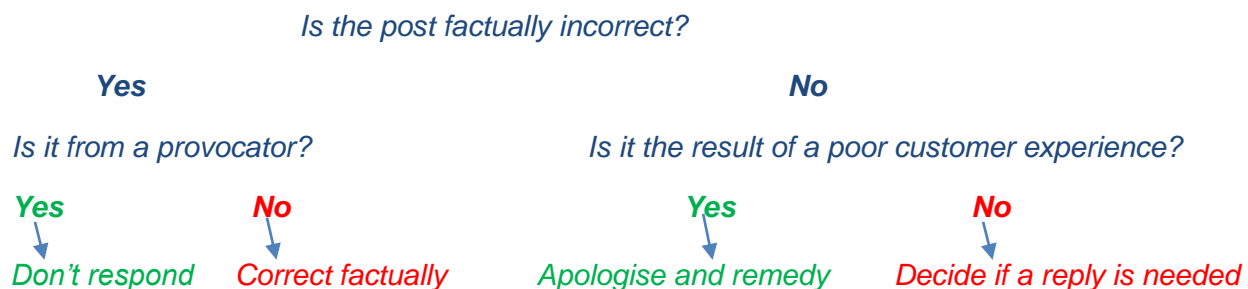
Know if your employer has a policy on social media, and if so what it says.

Additional Guidelines

- Material is difficult, if not impossible, to control once posted
- Assume that everything posted is visible to everyone forever
- Know the privacy settings of the site
- Do not criticise others, even if you believe you are “just voicing an opinion”
- Avoid giving online advice and suggest an office appointment
- Do not ignore negative posts
- Consider a general disclaimer that states the position and opinions are your own

Social Media Policy

Physiotherapists and physiotherapy clinics that use social media may want to consider adopting a social media policy or procedure to address inappropriate content. For example, a procedure may provide guidance, as follows:



References and Resources:

- NS College of Physiotherapists Practice Standards and Guidelines on Advertising, Informed Consent, and Personal Health Information, as well as our Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct
- Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) **Social Media**
<http://www.physiotherapy.ca/Practice-Resources/Practice-Management/Resources/Social-Media-Guidelines>
- Physiotherapy Alberta **Use of Social Media Guideline**
https://www.physiotherapyalberta.ca/files/practice_guideline_social_media.pdf