
SOCIAL MEDIA

Standard of Practice for Members of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario

Approved by Council as an Advisory: February 26, 2021

Approved: January 27, 2023



College of Chiropractors of Ontario

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Introduction

Social media is a powerful tool for communicating and networking and has become pervasive in all aspects of our lives, both personal and professional. This is especially true during global crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic. In recognition of the serious consequences of misusing social media, Council upgraded the Social Media Advisory it adopted in February 2021 to a College Standard.

Various social media platforms, such as Facebook (especially the group discussion forums), livestreaming sites, Twitter, and Instagram, have become sources of information, innovative ideas for clinical practice and coping strategies, networking and social and emotional support. For Members of the College, social media can be useful for:

- Advertising
- Educating the public and promoting foot health
- Networking with other Members or members of other colleges
- Sharing of ideas
- Professional development opportunities (e.g. conferences, webinars)
- Discussing challenging and/or interesting issues
- Gathering news, whether it's global, local and/or professional

As health care professionals, the opportunity to reach out, dialogue, inform, educate and learn online are tremendous. But Members must be cautious in their use of social media, especially with respect to maintaining patient confidentiality and professional boundaries in an environment that is inherently public and not secure. This Standard outlines the requirement for Members to use social media ethically to maintain public trust, respect professional boundaries, and reflect positively on the profession.

The Role of the College in Guiding Professional Practice

The role of the College in regulating the profession is to ensure the core principles, standards, and relevant legislation are interpreted and applied to practice and to conduct, including within the social media environment. This includes, but is not limited to, confidentiality and privacy, professional behaviour and boundaries, consent, and advertising standards.

Where there are many benefits of social media, as indicated above, those benefits need to balance against the obligation to protect the interest of the public and ensure professional, ethical behaviour and relationships are maintained.

Informed Consent

Members are accountable for ensuring health information is not collected, used, or disclosed without the informed consent of the patient. When interacting with the public and/or other members of the College using social media platforms, Members must be mindful and adhere to their professional obligations under, among others, the [Health Care Consent Act](#), the [Personal Health Information Protection Act \(PHIPA\)](#), and the [College's Standards](#) (including, in particular, the Patient Relations Standard).

Social Media Use

Members must consider the following when participating in social media:¹

1. Don't Lie

Members must only share information online that is true, not misleading, and/or obtained from credible sources. Members must always fact-check before posting or disseminating information. Members should always consider whether the information they are sharing is helpful to the reader or whether it will propagate unnecessary fear, panic and misinformation. Additionally, Members should always retract or correct any inaccurate comments or information they have shared.

2. Don't Pry

Members are prohibited from seeking personal or sensitive information about patients, patients' family members or friends. Doing so may constitute professional misconduct and/or a breach of the College's Standards.

3. Can't Delete

Most social media "posts" are searchable and very difficult to eliminate from the cyber-world. Therefore, Members should always "pause before you post" and consider whether what they are sharing online is helpful or harmful to others. In addition, Members could consider if what they are posting is targeting another individual or an identifiable group and could be considered as discriminatory, bigotry, offensive, cyber-bullying and/or unprofessional.

4. Don't Steal, Don't Reveal

Members should never share information that is confidential or proprietary. When sharing credible information online, Members should always cite and give credit to its source.

Privacy and Confidentiality

¹ Adapted from the "12-Word Social Media Policy" by the Mayo Clinic Social Media Network [https://www.hrreporter.com/DynamicData/AttachedDocs/facebook-refcheck-PRINT%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.hrreporter.com/DynamicData/AttachedDocs/facebook-refcheck-PRINT%20(2).pdf)

Members must comply with relevant privacy legislation, and other College standards of practice, when using social media. Members must never post a client's personal health information on any social media site.

When using social media, Members should remain updated on each platform's privacy settings. Members should be mindful that, even on their personal social media account(s), employers, colleagues, patients or the College may be able to see their posts or personal information. It is best to assume that anyone can see anything you post online, and that something you post can be copied or forwarded without your consent.

Advertising and Conflict of Interest

When using social media to advertise chiropody services, Members must ensure the information is factual and verifiable, and that it with the College's General Regulation on Advertising (O. Reg. 203/94, Part II) and the Advertising Guideline. Members must avoid a conflict of interest when using social media as noted in the Professional Misconduct Regulation, O. Reg. 750/93. Social media should not be used to pressure clients to accept chiropody services or to promote or reference a specific brand of equipment or device, contrary to O.Reg. 203/94.

Discussion Group/Forum Moderation

When Members are moderators of social media groups/forums related to the profession, it is their responsibility to ensure that the College's Standards (and relevant legislation) are followed on their respective platforms. Moderators must develop policies and guidelines for participation and communicate them clearly to their users/group members, and they must enforce these policies and guidelines and act accordingly if there are violations or breaches.

Monitoring Online Activity

Members must regularly monitor the social media sites they engage with to critically assess information and to remove unprofessional or offensive content that may impact their professional online presence.

Professional Image

Information, pictures and/or opinions posted on social media platforms and the internet are permanent. Negative or unprofessional images and/or statements by Members are harmful to the reputation of the profession and undermine patient or public trust.

"It is absolutely crucial to remember that anything you post online may stay there forever, in one form or another, so think carefully before you post – post information with eyes wide open, and consider the potential risks to their employment – current and future. Whether through the

Internet Archive's Wayback Machine Site or the caches of Google and Yahoo, old versions of websites are indeed searchable by those 'in the know'. What is actually found may include your own posted material, as well as information about you posted by others."

– Dr. Ann Cavoukian, the former Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario and one of the world's leading privacy experts

Other Helpful Resources

- 1) Canadian Medical Protective Association – Top 10 tips for using social media in professional practice: <https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/advice-publications/browsearticles/2014/top-10-tips-for-using-social-media-in-professional-practice>
- 2) How to use social media in healthcare: a guide for health professionals: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-health-care/>
- 3) Social Media and Health Care Professionals: Benefits, Risks and Best Practices: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4103576/>
- 4) How to be an Effective Social Media Moderator (LinkedIn): <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-effective-social-media-moderator-jay-majumdar>
- 5) Social Media – Embracing the Opportunities, Averting the Risks: https://www.nasba.org/app/uploads/2011/03/Social_Media_Policy_Article_PresentationAug09.pdf
- 6) Social Media Toolkit for Ontario Public Health Units (Feb 2014): <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/L/2014/ldcp-social-mediatoolkit.pdf?la=en>
- 7) The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit: https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf