



## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

This section contains resources with additional direction for registrants and are documents that are approved by the NLCHP and approved and or modified by the colleges. For college approved documents please visit the health profession College web site at [www.NLCMLS.ca](http://www.NLCMLS.ca)

NLCMLS Position Statement: Social Media

Approved: January 2015

The NLCMLS recognizes the use of social media as an effective means of communication for health practitioners and their businesses, as well as a method for communicating health information. Networking with social media also provides a nominal platform for communicating and information sharing with health professional groups and colleagues.

Social media is a collection of Internet based programs (Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs, as well as chat rooms) used for information sharing. Transferring information through social media by any format (text, photos, audio, and video) is rapid and easily accessible. While the fluidity of social media may provide a communication advantage, there are important points to consider when choosing to communicate through social media that require attention and give caution to this approach of communication.

This position statement serves as an advisory for health professionals within the jurisdiction of the NLCMLS who use social media in their personal and/or professional practice, but also for professionals as registrants of the NLCHP who may have questions around the use of social media.

The use of social media can encourage and facilitate a culture of collegial and professional respect among professionals and provide a welcome resource for clients. However, users must appreciate the responsibility required to manage the personal and professional risks.



Members of the NLCMLS College who wish to be part of its social media networks must identify themselves by email to a Board member giving their MTL number and name. Once a request is received by a Board member it will be cross referenced with the Health Council registration of members for the current year before being approved.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

First and foremost, the confidentiality of client and registrant information must be strictly maintained. No information that can identify an individual should be publicly communicated through social media and communicating health status information must be contained in a manner dictated by organizational or employer policy. Even posting information that may be perceived as non-identifiable is not exempt from this position as clients and their families can easily identify themselves.

## Professionalism

All registered health professionals must continue to act according to professional and ethical standards while conducting any online activity. Registered health professionals are obligated to uphold public trust in their profession and are accountable to their actions. Any inappropriate use of social media may be considered conduct deserving of sanction where a breach of practice standards can be demonstrated.

Additionally, as per professional ethics codes, all health professionals are required to respect professional boundaries. "Friend" requests from clients, friends or family can transition relationships from professional to more personal leaving the professional responsibility less defined and exposed to risk in terms of privacy, confidentiality, and the sharing of information.



Guidelines to Consider:

1. Do abide by organizational policies regarding the professional and personal use of social media. Employers and professional regulatory bodies have strict policies on professional conduct and will reprimand individuals who breach conduct policy.
2. Be judicious. Elect to use the strictest privacy settings on social media sites but remember nothing is private. Do not post anything on a social media site you would not want viewed by prospective clients, business associates, employers, or regulators. Derogatory comments, inappropriate photos, foul language, and crude jokes can be viewed as a reflection of character, and by extension your profession.
3. Be prepared. Check your profile regularly to view what others may post on your pages and remove what may be considered inappropriate. Use search engines to find where your name may be associated on other sites and check to have it removed if it could be detrimental to your professional or personal reputation.
4. The NLCHP does not monitor personal pages on social media sites, but information found on these sites can be used in an investigation of a complaint against a health professional registered with the NLCHP.
5. Offering health related information or recommendation is subject to the same verification as that given in a professional environment and if inaccurate, false, or misleading could be grounds for a professional liability claim.
6. Posting information anonymously or under a pseudonym will not protect against possible consequences of breaching of confidentiality or defamation.
7. Be aware of the risks associated with email and electronic communication with clients; interception by friends or family members, misdirection to a similar address, altered diagnostic or treatment reports and loss of important electronic information. Just an email header with a clinic name can offer a certain amount of information to friends or family when the email platform is open and the inbox subject line is revealed.



8. Registered health professionals as custodians of personal information must implement privacy safeguards and policy and should, where possible limit the amount of health information transferred electronically and by email.

9. Professional boundaries must be respected. In cases where a client may make a request for information or services through a professionally designated social media website, efforts should be taken to ensure that the relationship is strictly professional. If a client continues contact but for more personal or social responses, then they should be informed that the website is for professional contact and information only.