

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINE

(BASED ON CPSO MEDIA POLICY)



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INTRODUCTION

The term 'social media' refers to communication technologies and practices that enable interaction and facilitate the creation, sharing, and aggregation of content (opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives) amongst virtual communities and networks. There are many prominent examples of social media platforms, networks, and forums including Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, among many others. Social media can be used for both personal and professional purposes. Dentists are now using social media in their practices to interact with colleagues and patients, to seek out dental and medical information online, and to share content with a broad audience. Whether engaging in social media for personal or professional use, the nature of these platforms, which are highly accessible, informal, and public, introduce important questions about the steps dentists should take to uphold their important professional, ethical, and legal obligations.

PURPOSE

This document provides guidance to dentists about how to engage in social media while continuing to meet relevant professional, ethical, and legal obligations. This document does not establish any new expectations for dentists that are unique to social media. Rather, this document clarifies how existing professional expectations can be met in the social media sphere.

COLLEGE POSITION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The College's position is that dentists are expected to comply with all their existing professional, ethical, and legal expectations while engaging in the use of social media platforms and technologies. The College recognizes that social media platforms may present important opportunities to enhance patient care, education, professional competence, and collegiality, among other potential benefits. Professional, ethical, and legal obligations that govern dental practices are set out in the College's legislation, bylaws, code of ethics, and standards. A number of these obligations are relevant to the use of social media by dentists and are articulated below. These obligations are not unique to social media, apply to dental practice in general, must be met by all dentists, and are as follows.

Dentists must:

- Comply with relevant legislation, bylaws, code of ethics, and standards;

- Comply with the CDSS Advertising Standard;
- Comply with all professional, ethical, and legal obligations to maintain patient privacy and confidentiality;
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients and their fraternity;
- Maintain professional and respectful relationships with patients, colleagues, and other members of the healthcare team; and
- Comply with the law related to defamation, copyright, and plagiarism when posting content online.

GUIDELINES

To satisfy the above professional, ethical, and legal expectations while engaging in social media and not cause harm to the public and public confidence in the profession, it is recommended that dentists:

1. Assume that all content on social media is public and accessible to all.
2. Pause Think Post.
3. Protect their own reputation, the reputation of the profession, and the public trust by not posting content that could be viewed as unprofessional or unethical.
4. Be a responsible disseminator of information. Provide information that is evidence-based, verified, and accurate from reliable sources and clearly distinguish between personal opinion and professional advice.
5. Create a respectful, safe, and engaging environment by not posting or sharing offensive, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, or bullying content.
6. Consider the implications of the content. Avoid posting in haste, anger or frustration. Be mindful of the language and avoid profanity.
7. Be mindful of their social media presence and be proactive in removing content posted by themselves or others which may be viewed as unprofessional. Reasonable steps should be taken to remove inappropriate content that has been posted by oneself or others.
8. Be mindful that once information has been posted online, it may be difficult or impossible to remove.
9. Maintain separate social media accounts for personal and professional use to avoid the complicating of boundaries and ensure the professional account is solely for professional interactions and content.
10. Refrain from establishing personal connections with patients or persons closely associated with them online, as this may not allow dentists to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and may compromise objectivity. It is acceptable to create an online connection with patients for professional purposes only.
11. Consider any online friend or follower requests from a patient. In many cases it may be best to politely refuse and explain it is beyond the scope of professional boundaries and relationships.
12. Exercise caution when posting information online that relates to an actual patient without explicit consent to ensure compliance with legal and professional obligations to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Bear in mind that an unnamed patient may still be identified through a range of other information, such as a description of their clinical condition or area of residence. A breach of confidentiality may be deemed to have occurred if the facts available are sufficient for the patient to be identified, even if only by themselves.
13. Refrain from seeking out patient information that may be available online without prior consent. Patients are entitled to a reasonable expectation of privacy. While dentists are expected to adhere to all their relevant legal obligations under the Health Information Protection Act with respect to the collection of personal health information, they should also refrain from seeking out other types of non-protected information online without prior consent.
14. Refrain from providing clinical advice to specific patients through social media. It is acceptable, however, to use social media to disseminate generic dental or health information for educational or information sharing purposes. Clinical advice is defined as advice of a clinical nature that is directed toward a specific individual to

address a medical concern. It is distinct from general health information that is not patient specific but disseminated to a general audience for education or information sharing purposes.

15. Read, understand, and apply the strictest privacy settings necessary to maintain control over access to their personal information and social media presence.
16. Routinely monitor their social media presence to ensure that their personal and professional information is accurate and appropriate.
17. Remember that social media platforms are constantly evolving and be proactive in considering how professional expectations apply in any given set of circumstances.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Negative reviews on social media can be stressful and upsetting, however there are effective approaches to manage and mitigate these types of conflict.

1. Stay calm and assess the situation. Avoid responding impulsively and take a moment to understand the nature and scope of the review.
2. Avoid engaging or responding to inflammatory comments or provocations as this can often escalate the situations.
3. Contact colleagues and professional organizations for advice and support
4. If a response is necessary, be professional and factual addressing any misinformation with accurate information in a calm manner.
5. Utilize any available mechanisms of the social media platforms to manage harassment by reporting abusive content and blocking the offending reviewer.
6. Maintain records of all messages, comments, and posts related to the review. This documentation can be important for reporting of the incident or for possible legal recourse.
7. Consult with legal counsel to explore options for legal recourse regarding reviews with significant defamation or threats.

The decision to respond to a negative review is a personal decision which may have an upside by providing context to the situation but may have a downside by prolonging the attention to the circumstance with subsequent negative reviews. Regardless, all registrants who choose to respond to such unfortunate inquiries should do so with professionalism and without breaching the Health Information Protection Act compliance.

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The College recognizes, with thanks, the contributions of these organizations to the development of this guideline.