

Social media guidelines for MRTs and ENPs in Alberta

Introduction and purpose

The Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists (The College) has created this document to guide regulated members in making informed decisions when using social media. As professionals granted the privilege of self-regulation by Albertans, MRTs and ENPs are expected to uphold the integrity of the profession by engaging in social media thoughtfully and responsibly.

Social media overview

Social media is defined as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” by Merriam-Webster. The landscape of social media platforms is continually changing. Some of the most popular include the following:

- Facebook (personal profiles and groups, both public and closed)
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- Reddit
- YouTube

Social media platforms can play an important role in our lives by helping us stay connected and informed. They give us the power to interact with others, learn what’s happening in the world or a particular community and share information and opinions simply by accessing a website or app. The ease of use and generally casual nature of social media may lead to complacency when it comes to what we share and how we interact with others online.

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The College encourages regulated members to remember that even when they are using social media in a personal capacity, anything they do online has the potential to be visible publicly and may therefore reflect upon their profession. Even the highest privacy and security settings won’t protect anyone from potential issues like security breaches and others sharing screenshots. This document is meant to provide guidelines to help regulated members understand the appropriate ways to communicate through social media.

As professionals granted the privilege of self-regulation by Albertans, MRTs and ENPs are expected to uphold the integrity of the profession by engaging in social media thoughtfully and responsibly.

Guiding documents

The College's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics provide a framework for MRTs and ENPs that helps inform their professional decisions. There is no foolproof way to ensure personal social media activities remain private, so regulated members should keep the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics in mind when using social media to protect the profession as well as their own interests.

The following highlights the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics indicators that can be applied to social media use.

Standards of Practice

- **Standard 2.4 Professional Boundaries, indicator f:** Utilize the member's position to establish only appropriate professional relationships with a patient, their family, or a colleague
- **Standard 2.4 Professional Boundaries, indicator g:** Avoid expression of views or information to the patient that is not related to the professional relationship (includes interactions through social media)
- **Standard 2.5 Privacy/Confidentiality, indicator a:** Comply with applicable privacy legislation and employer/organization policies and procedures relating to confidentiality of patient information
- **Standard 2.6 Communication, indicator c:** Adhere to principles of professionalism regardless of the type of communication (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, written, electronic text, email or social media)

Code of Ethics

- **Principle 1, indicator d: Confidentiality** – A regulated member respects patients' rights to privacy and confidentiality of personal and health information within the boundaries of the law
- **Principle 3, indicator a: Personal conduct** – A regulated member maintains a level of personal conduct that upholds the integrity of the profession and the trust of the public

There are three main areas a regulated member should keep in mind when using social media to mitigate risk: professionalism, boundaries and privacy and confidentiality.

As regulated health professionals, MRTs and ENPs are expected to be safe, competent, ethical, accountable and professional, as stated in the assumptions of the Standards of Practice.

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Professionalism

As regulated health professionals, MRTs and ENPs are expected to be safe, competent, ethical, accountable and professional, as stated in the assumptions of the Standards of Practice. Maintaining professionalism when communicating online is very important. When using social media, MRTs and ENPs should:

- Maintain respect for patients, colleagues, employer(s) and others online
- Avoid personal attacks and insulting or derogatory comments against colleagues, employers, patients and practice settings
- Credit the thoughts and work of others
- Represent their credentials accurately when it is necessary to share them
- Present their personal opinions, especially those that are opposing, in a professional manner
- Consider including a disclaimer that views are their own where appropriate
- Acknowledge that anything they say, share or "like" can be misconstrued by others or taken out of context

Boundaries

MRTs and ENPs should always maintain clear professional boundaries. When using social media, MRTs and ENPs should:

- Ignore/delete friend requests from patients
- Refrain from interacting with patients and/or avoid online relationships with patients where a professional relationship already exists
- Avoid using professional designations where possible as these may give the impression to others that they speak on behalf of the profession
- Ask others not to tag them on any posts without their permission, where possible
- Request that others remove any undesirable content or tags related to them

Privacy and confidentiality

In addition to the guidelines established in the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, there is legislation that applies to privacy and confidentiality. The *Health Information Act* (HIA) establishes rules to protect the privacy of an individual's health information. It regulates how health information can be collected, used and disclosed.

Posting information about a patient on social media is a breach of the HIA, regardless of whether identifying information has been removed. The combination of information about the person writing the post and details about patient characteristics or conditions can be enough for a patient, their family members or other health professionals to determine who the post is about.

Regulated members must always respect patients' privacy and confidentiality. When using social media, MRTs and ENPs should:

- Never share patient information, location, or images
- Control personal privacy settings but remember they may not ensure privacy — breaches in privacy may be far-reaching and, in most cases, not anticipated at the time of occurrence
- Limit the number of personal details they share
- Acknowledge that sharing employment information may result in others associating personal social media activity with the employer and/or contacting the employer about the activity
- Avoid disclosing the names and personal information of their colleagues, managers and supervisors and discussing undisclosed incidents that have occurred in the workplace
- Follow their employer's policies on using social media in the workplace

Summary

MRTs and ENPs are expected to comply with the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics and be aware that they extend to any environment where an MRT or ENP can interact with patients and the public. Activity on social media may lead to unprofessional conduct findings if it harms the profession's integrity.

Social media plays an important role in modern culture, but engaging with these platforms comes with certain risks. By being careful and mindful when using social media, MRTs and ENPs can protect themselves while maintaining the integrity of their profession and the trust of Albertans.

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