

**COLLEGE OF PARAMEDICS OF NOVA SCOTIA
PARAMEDIC PRACTICE GUIDELINE**

Social Media

Introduction:

This guideline outlines the paramedic's role in using social media. It will help the Paramedic understand:

- Benefits and risks of social media
- Professional presence
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Professional boundaries
- Organizational policies
- Integrity
- Accountability

Like all practice support tools, this document must be used in conjunction with the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

What is Social Media?

Social media are the online and mobile tools used to share opinions, information and experiences through written message, images, video, or audio clips; and includes websites and applications used for social networking. Examples of popular social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, discussion forms and message boards. 3

Benefits and Risks of Social Media

Social media, when used appropriately, can have many benefits in the delivery of paramedic services. The benefits are primarily because it can be used to move information to many people quickly and without regard to their geographic locations. For instance, social media can be used to:

- Distribute evidence-informed health information to patients and families
- Host patient and family support networks
- Communicate vital information during an emergency
- Facilitate professional connections and mentoring relationships
- Enhance paramedic student education in the classroom and clinical areas
- Recruit participants for research studies and facilitate research
- Shape the reputation and credibility of Paramedicine.

Like many things, if used inappropriately, social media can pose several risks to patients, paramedics, and the paramedic profession.

Risks to patients include:

- Easy access to unqualified medical opinions or non-evidence informed health information
- Breach of privacy or confidentiality

Risks to Paramedics include:

- Misuse of social media (intentional or not) may breach the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice leading to disciplinary or even legal action

- Blurring professional and personal worlds which creates risks to privacy, confidentiality, reputation, and intellectual property
- Information and 'posts' can be shared and re-shared without your consent or knowledge even when privacy settings are at the highest level
- Any information or post shared becomes the property of the social media platform and as such may be used (or sold) at their discretion
- Private and confidential information (about you, a patient, your employer) can be easily and unintentionally shared
- Social media posts can create a permanent record that cannot easily be deleted. Copies of deleted information may still exist on search engines or in the electronic files of others.

Risks to the profession include:

- Public confidence in the profession can be damaged by the irresponsible posting of individual paramedic

Paramedic's Responsibilities on Social Media

If you are using social media, there are several strategies you can use to minimize your risk and continue to meet your standards of practice including:

- Maintaining a professional presence
- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy
- Maintaining professional boundaries
- Adhering to organizational policies
- Integrity and the integrity of the paramedic profession
- Be accountable

From the professional presence's perspective:

- Use the same level of professionalism in your online interactions as you do in face-to-face interactions
- Keep work-related social media activities separate from personal social media activities, especially if you use social media in your paramedic role
- Do not use your paramedic credentials for personal gain
- Do not post about work-related incidents or make unprofessional or negative comments about clients, co-workers, or your workplace
- Do not post information that gives the impression you are not able to provide unbiased care
- Separate your personal opinions from paramedic opinions, especially if they differ
- Consider not identifying yourself as a paramedic in your online profile

Regarding confidentiality and privacy:

- Maintain confidentiality and privacy of patients and co-worker's information. A breach of confidentiality or privacy, even inadvertently, can damage the paramedic-patient relationship and negatively impact the paramedic profession. Privacy can be breached with far less information than you think
- Report confidentiality and privacy breaches immediately to your employer
- Ensure you understand that posting anonymously or under a pseudonym does not protect you against the possible consequences of a breach of confidentiality

In relation to professional boundaries:

- Maintain professional boundaries, especially if you are in the dual role of a friend and a paramedic. Do not engage in personal social media relationships with current patients and their families. However, if an online friend becomes a patient, make sure you do not unintentionally cross boundaries.
- Do not post, repost, transmit or disseminate any information that may be reasonably anticipated to violate the patient's rights to confidentiality or privacy, or otherwise degrade or embarrass the patient
- Do not accept "friend" requests from current or former patients or their families. Connecting in this way could be interpreted as a continuation of the paramedic-patient relationship or that the patient is entitled to access to your services in ways other patients are not
- Do not collect or transmit patient related images using your personal device, even with the patient's consent

From an organizational policies perspective:

- Review and follow organizational policies related to the use of personal and professional social media
- Do not speak on behalf of your employer or the profession unless authorized to do so
- Do not conduct professional discussions or communication on social media without clear organizational policies and processes

With regard to integrity and the integrity of the paramedic profession:

- Only use organizationally approved communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace issues
- Use caution if you identify yourself as a paramedic online, whether in a biography or in a specific post. When you identify yourself as a paramedic on social media or use a platform to share paramedical information, you immediately create a connection between your personal and professional life and are expected to uphold all professional obligations.
- Do not offer specific health related advice in response to questions or comments as an appropriate therapeutic relationship has not been established

In relation to accountability:

- Recognize that your accountability to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice apply to your social media use.
- Work with your manager or employer to develop a social media policy if there is not one available.
- Ensure you understand that inappropriate use of social media, including personal use while working, can result in a complaint to your employer or the College of Paramedics. Either of these may result in disciplinary action.

Key Points regarding the use of social media:

- There are benefits and risks to social media use
- You are accountable to know how your employer policy, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice apply to your social media use
- Maintain professional boundaries while using social media
- Maintain confidentiality and privacy

- It takes less information than you think to violate privacy or confidentiality online
- Your individual online actions can reflect negatively on your employer or the entire paramedic profession