



Date First Approved: 2017/11/25

Effective Date: 2017/11/25

Revision Date:

Approved by: Board of Directors

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized the way individuals communicate with one another. Social media platforms have facilitated online professional relationships and information sharing amongst a multitude of audiences. The Nova Scotia Regulator of Respiratory Therapy (NSRRT) recognizes the many benefits of social media from a professional perspective and the opportunity for engagement of respiratory therapists (RTs) with their peers, as well as the public. The NSRRT also recognizes the potential risks of improper use of social media platforms. This guideline will address the use of social media and online platforms while maintaining professional boundaries, integrity and confidentiality. It will provide additional clarity for NSRRT designated spokespersons, NSRRT members, respiratory therapy students, regulators, educators, employers, and members of the public on the appropriate use of social media tools, both within and outside the workplace.

Definition of Social Media

The term “Social Media” refers to electronic forms of communication that people use to share their opinions, information and experiences, images and video or audio files. It includes, but is not limited to, common social networking websites such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Flickr, discussion boards and forums, and personal, professional, or anonymous blogs.

Benefits and Risks

Social Media has many uses including engagement with friends, family, colleagues, and even complete strangers. Social media platforms can create a sense of community, facilitate information sharing, build relationships, offer access to resources for professional development opportunities, and even invite instant direct engagement. When not used appropriately however, it can be damaging to both your personal and professional brand and may compromise the public trust. The way you use social media platforms and your behaviour in those platforms directly

reflects on you and possibly your workplace. It may influence those who see, read, share, or repurpose your posts. Before posting on social media platforms, or commenting on another user's content, consider the audience, evaluate your intent, and consider the possible consequences. The boundaries between personal, public and professional space are increasingly blurred. Ultimately, you are responsible for what you post on social media platforms.

Privacy and Confidentiality

As per the NSRRT Code of Ethics, respiratory therapists shall keep in confidence all privileged information concerning the patient in accordance with the Nova Scotia Personal Health Information Act, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, and any other health information protection legislation that may apply. Express written consent of patients is required for use of video images, photographic images, conversations, audio recordings, and verbal and/or written testimonials relating to any part of the patient's biographical information or care. Do not use social media platforms to post about or comment on anything you hear or see about any patient, patient family member(s), or circumstance. Omitting names or limiting details does not ensure a patient or family member will not easily be identifiable. Before electing to use social media, be familiar with the Terms and Conditions of each platform being used. Incorporate the strictest privacy settings but be aware that nothing is truly private and deleted posts may remain stored and accessible depending on the Terms and Conditions of the social media platform you are using. Even with the highest level of privacy settings, content can be copied and shared without your knowledge.

Professional Integrity and Accountability

RTs in Nova Scotia must abide by the NSRRT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. RTs shall avoid any activity that creates a conflict of interest and/or compromises the public trust. RTs should use sound judgement with all posts, as personal opinions may be interpreted as professional comments by the viewing audience. Social media is not the proper platform to address workplace concerns or issues with colleagues, students, or employers. Refrain from commenting on other's posts of this nature. The NSRRT cautions RTs to respect and enforce professional boundaries when contacted by patients or patient family members on social media platforms.

Advertising

Digital advertising has become a key tool in promoting businesses and services. Social media can be a valuable business resource for communicating with members of the public, employees, and other health professions. When choosing social media to promote a business or service, or sell or endorse a product, ensure all communications are honest, transparent, objective, accurate, and evidence based. All advertising communications must adhere to the Regulated Health Professions Act, General Regulations, Respiratory Therapy Regulations and the NSRRT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics and Privacy requirements.

Employer Policies

Be aware of and comply with all relevant employer policies relating to use of social media, including general policies on computer and internet use. Consider how social media posts will reflect on not only your reputation, but the reputation of your employer

Social Media and NSRRT Designated Spokespersons

The NSRRT may use social media to communicate and share information with registrants, stakeholders, and members of the public. The NSRRT Board will appoint a designated spokesperson(s) to moderate all NSRRT social media communication. The NSRRT designated spokesperson(s) will ensure the content of all blogs, discussion forums, and other sources of NSRRT social media initiatives are appropriate, purposeful, and in line with the Regulated Health Professions Act, General Regulations, Respiratory Therapy Regulations, all NSRRT policies and position statements, and the NSRRT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. The NSRRT will create Terms of Use Guidelines for any NSRRT operated social media venture. The designated spokesperson will employ reasonable monitoring measures which prevent, or ensure the timely removal of, inappropriate or defamatory content.

Regulatory Implications

RTs have a responsibility to demonstrate behaviours that uphold the public trust in the profession. Inappropriate social media use may call into question the trustworthiness of the profession and can be considered a breach of the Regulated Health Professions Act, General Regulations, Respiratory Therapy Regulations and the NSRRT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. Inappropriate social media use can result in a professional misconduct complaint to the employer or to the NSRRT and can result in disciplinary action.

RT QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA USE
Do consider the audience, evaluate your intent, and consider the possible consequences of social media posts.
Do be aware of the Terms of Use of all social media platforms you are using.
Do use strict privacy settings.
Do be aware of all employer policies related to social media.
Do ensure all communications are factual, accurate, and adhere to the Regulated Health Professions Act, General Regulations, Respiratory Therapy Regulations, and the NSRRT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.
Do not use social media to post about or comment on anything you hear or see about a patient, patient family members, or circumstance.
Do not address workplace issues on social media and refrain from commenting on other's posts of this nature.

Glossary

Breach: Failing to observe a law, agreement, or code of conduct.

Conflict of Interest: A situation in which personal considerations, either emotional or financial, affect professional judgment and impact the delivery of care. Professional practice decisions must first and foremost promote the best interest of the public.

Defamatory: Remarks or postings that may damage the reputation of a person or place of employment.

Designated Spokesperson: An individual who is appointed to be the primary representative of an organization and make official statements. In the case of this policy, an individual who is appointed by the NSRRT to share information and communicate with both registrants and members of the public through social media forums.

Monitoring measures: Active, routine and timely review of content for adherence to NSRRT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Professional Misconduct: Conduct that would reasonably be regarded as disgraceful, dishonorable or unprofessional and which may include: failing to uphold Professional Ethics; failing to maintain Standards of Practice; abusing a person; failing to exercise appropriate discretion in respect of the disclosure of confidential information; inappropriately using the professional status of respiratory therapist for personal gain; promoting for personal gain any drug, device, treatment, procedure, product or service that is unnecessary, ineffective or unsafe; publishing, or causing to be published, any advertisement that is false, fraudulent, deceptive or misleading; taking or using the designation RRT or GRT or describing one's activity as "respiratory therapy" in an advertisement or publication, unless the referenced activity falls within the definition of "practice of respiratory therapy".

Professional Boundaries: The effective and appropriate relationships and interactions between professionals and the public they serve. These limits exist to protect both the professional and the patient. Any behaviour or interaction which compromises the patient, the professional and/or the therapy is a violation of professional boundaries.

Social Media: Electronic forms of communication that people use to share their opinions, information and experiences, images and video or audio files. Social networking sites include common sources such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Flickr, discussion boards and forums, and personal, professional, or anonymous blogs.

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Regulated Health Professions Act, c 15, S.N.S 2023