

Guidance to Nurses and Midwives on **Social Media** and **Social Networking**



Archive

Contents

Social media and the 6 Ps	2
Introduction	4
What are social media and social networking	5
What are the benefits of social media use and social networking	6
What does this guidance provide	8
Top Tips for social media and social networking	9
Practice examples	14
Conclusion	17
The role of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland	18
Acknowledgements	19
References	20
Resources	21

Social Media and the 6 P's



Professional

Act professionally at all times.



Positive

Keep posts positive.



Person-free; patient-free

Keep posts patient or person free.



Protect yourself

Protect your professionalism, your reputation and yourself.



Privacy

Keep your personal and professional life separate. Check your privacy settings and respect privacy of others.



Pause before you post

Consider the implications of what you're posting. Avoid posting in haste or in anger. Don't respond to other posts in haste.

Introduction

Bord Altranais agus Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann, (NMBI – the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland), is currently reviewing the professional guidance it provides to nurses and midwives.

We recognise that we need to give guidance to registrants on social media use and social networking practice. We have collaborated with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO), Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) and Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), to produce this guidance document on social media and social networking.

International nursing and midwifery regulators, professional organisations and unions, have also been developing guidance on social media highlighting the benefits of appropriate use and the consequences of improper use.

Social media websites and social networking practice are popular with all age groups. These guidelines have been developed for you to use at work and at home, so that you can keep your use of social media professional at all times.

With social media use and social networking practice increasing all the time, this guidance should prove timely. There are many positive, professional applications of social media and social networking practice in the workplace. Consideration, though, has also to be given to their inappropriate use and any risks to the public, registrants and healthcare organisations involved.

What are social media and social networking?

“Social media consists of the internet or web-based technologies that allow people to connect, communicate and interact in real time to share and exchange information.” (Rowe, 2011).

While the term ‘social media’ relates to websites with a connective or linking function, ‘social networking’ is more an active process of reaching out. It means using social media sites to network with others online whether they are professionals, friends or strangers with similar interests and goals. It is widely recognised that social media and social networking are dynamic in nature and so, the definitions will continue to evolve and change as will the way these social tools are used by the professions and the public alike.

Examples of social media and social networking include Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter.



What are the benefits of social media use and social networking?

There are many professional uses of social media, including:



1 access to support networks for professionals and service users



2 nursing and midwifery professional discussion forums



5 mobile and online learning



6 access to research



9 continuing professional development (CPD)



10 access to low-cost, 'webinars' online

Many more applications of social media and social networking will develop as technology develops and expands and greater professional resources become available and acceptable in the workplace.



What does this guidance provide?

This guidance has been written for registered nurses and midwives, nursing and midwifery students and nursing and midwifery managers so that they can:

- learn about the professional benefits of social media and social networking practice;
- understand the basic guidelines for safe social media and social networking;
- identify areas that they need to explore;
- identify major areas of risk through the review of general information including some case studies; and
- have references and resources for further reading and research.

Top Tips for Social Media and Social Networking

Understand the basics of social media before you go online



This includes:

- being familiar with the rules and practices of any social media space before you join it;
- knowing how to set and manage your online account privacy settings;
- understanding the concepts of privacy, confidentiality, defamation, cyber-bullying, libel and copyright;
- understanding the benefits and risks of the media you're using.

Keep your personal life and professional life separate online



You should make sure you protect your personal identity online.

Do: Think carefully about what information you want to share about yourself online and how these details may be viewed by others. This may include identifying yourself as a nurse or midwife and where you work or attend college.

Don't:

- 'friend' service-users or ex-service-users;
- take photos or videos in the workplace unless part of approved professional training, teaching or learning;
- vent or air grievances online; and
- refer to work situations, colleagues or service users.

Always respect professional and personal boundaries.

Respect patient/client privacy and confidentiality



Social media is open, shared and informal. Privacy, confidentiality and professionalism at all times are core nursing and midwifery values. Therefore, you need to respect the legal rights of privacy and confidentiality of your patients and colleagues and respect the values of your profession at all times. Post appropriately.

Use social media websites and social networking for your professional development



There are many ways to use social media professionally and NMBI supports the responsible use of social media sites by nurses, midwives and students. You could, for example, keep current with research using Twitter, Facebook updates from organisations, teaching tools on YouTube and networking with peers on LinkedIn. You should aim to make your online presence valuable to yourself and others. Try to 'engage, exchange and enrich' (Kalia, 2011).

Pause before you post – is it appropriate for social media?



Stay professional at all times. Do not post messages or information about something you wouldn't want your colleagues and managers to see. If you are about to publish something that you wouldn't say in a room full of people, then don't send it.

Imagine your post 'going viral': if in doubt, leave it out!



Even a 'private' post can 'go viral' in hours across the internet. Even if you are sure your settings are private, friends can re-post or comment on content you have put online. What you post online is permanent.

Use "Netiquette" when you are online



'Netiquette' refers to minding your manners online. For example, good netiquette advises that you **DON'T USE CAPITALS** in emails or messages – it's like shouting online.

Remember that different social media can have netiquette guidelines that are very specific to the medium in question. Do some research on the media you're using and find out what's considered to be good netiquette for those media. For example, Twitter gives tips on the use of hashtags (#) for marking keywords or topics in a Tweet. Irrespective of the media you're using, always be respectful of others. Don't post in anger. Be aware of legal issues and don't engage in illegal or unprofessional behaviour. Never post, re-post or comment on sexually explicit material online.

Check your account settings and online passwords regularly



Privacy settings can change regularly on social media sites. Review your own settings every few weeks. Devise 'strong' passwords. 'Strong' passwords are at least seven characters long and are a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. A strong password shouldn't spell out any word that is in the dictionary and it shouldn't contain your name or company name. It should also be very different from earlier passwords. If your password is 'weak', it might be guessable leaving your account susceptible to hacking.

Remove any links between you and inappropriate content online



If you are 'tagged' (a link to your name) in inappropriate photos, updates or messages that other people post online or if you're linked in any way to pages or groups that have unprofessional or illegal content, you need to take action. Remove the links, ask to be 'un-tagged', request the photos be removed and report illegal or abusive content.

Report any inappropriate content



If you see inappropriate content on the social media pages you use, report it. At work, if you see inappropriate content online or you see your organisation named inappropriately, make sure you report it to your manager and refer to your organisation's Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy if it exists.

Understand and follow your organisation's ICT policies



Your organisation may have ICT policies in place. Even if you're using your own smartphone in work for professional reasons, make sure you follow the ICT policy. Time spent online for personal reasons at work is like chatting to a personal friend during work time. Organisations should set out clear policies for staff and students on their use of social networking sites, encouraging responsible use. If you want to start using social media sites professionally, you should first speak to your manager.

Practice examples

We present some examples here about professional practice with social media and social networking. These examples are based on real situations that nurses and midwives have shared with us. General points of advice and issues for your consideration follow.

Example 1



Patrick is a fourth-year nursing student and describes his recent clinical rotation in a hospital emergency room on his Twitter account. He tweets about a shift where he was involved in caring for victims in a road traffic accident and posts a graphic image of a patient with a severe leg injury in the tweet. He shares that he has learned a lot about emergency nursing. A fellow nursing student concerned about this posting brings it to the attention of their nursing lecturer several days later.

Guidance



This example highlights some key issues for using social media appropriately and acting professionally even in a student role. Patrick demonstrated a lack of respect towards patients as he did not maintain confidentiality of care. Taking photos without consent, then uploading them for public viewing using a personal phone in the clinical setting are also other serious acts of irresponsibility. These breaches of care need to be discussed with Patrick and should involve the clinical placement coordinator and tutors from the particular clinical setting as appropriate. The college's policy for student conduct and hospital policy for social media use can inform the lecturer's approach with Patrick.

Example 2



Aisling is an asthma nurse working the outpatient respiratory clinic in a Cork hospital. A service-user finds her advice and support invaluable to managing his symptoms. He also develops a close rapport with her in the clinic. At home, he looks for her on Facebook. He sends her a 'friend' request.

Aisling is in a dilemma. Should she ignore the request and seem unfriendly, or accept the request which means the service user would see personal information about Aisling that she normally only shares with friends?

Guidance



This case is about professional boundaries and maintaining a professional relationship with the service user. Online contact can blur these important boundaries and a nurse's professionalism may be compromised. Aisling should decline the friend request. This does not send a message to the person who has sent the request. If the service user asks at the next appointment, Aisling can explain it is a personal account for keeping up to date with personal friends. One way to keep your private life private and maintain professional boundaries is to use separate professional and personal pages on social media sites.

Example 3



Helen is a midwife with three years' experience in the labour ward. While looking at her Facebook page at break time, she reads a comment posted by Mary (a co-worker who she is 'friends' with on Facebook). Mary's comment is responding to a post from Jennifer, another work colleague.

Jennifer in her post is complaining about Helen's work on the ward. The implication is that her clinical skills are not up to scratch. The posting appears to have been shared also with people outside of work. Helen is becoming quite concerned as this is the third time Jennifer has posted spiteful comments about her to mutual Facebook friends, with each comment becoming nastier than the previous. Helen is reluctant to speak to Jennifer herself so she brings her concerns to the attention of the clinical midwife manager.

Guidance



The online comments posted by Jennifer about Helen could be viewed as a form of defamation and cyber bullying. Defamation applies online within the world of social media just as it does in the real world and legal action can result. Respecting colleagues is an expected standard of professional behaviour. All nurses and midwives have responsibility to maintain and respect the dignity of others they work with.

The midwife who is posting the hostile comments should be made aware of the inappropriateness of her actions including the posting to other work colleagues. Online comments by a nurse or midwife regarding co-workers, even if posted on a personal Facebook page, may constitute abuse or harassment.

Example 3 Guidance (continued)



In this case, disciplinary action by the employer is likely. Nursing and midwifery managers should ensure new and existing employees are trained in the policies of the organisation about the use of social media and behaviour towards colleagues. The HSE Dignity at Work Policy for the Health Service, Anti Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure' (2009) is a useful resource for individuals and organisations dealing with such issues.

Conclusion

Social media and social networking practice is something that can bring huge benefits to you, your profession and your patients. Make sure you apply the same common-sense and codes of practice online as you do in real-life.

The same standards of conduct that are expected of you in your daily professional practice also apply when you use social media and electronic forms of communication.

Nurses and midwives are required to understand and apply NMBI's most current version of standards and guidelines in their practice.

The bottom line for nurses and midwives regarding online social networking is, if you have a social media presence online, keep it separate from your professional identity, keep it positive and, most importantly, keep it person-free.

The role of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) as established under the Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011, has as its main objectives to protect the public and to ensure the integrity of nursing and midwifery practice. As the statutory body, NMBI sets the standards for the education, registration and professional conduct of nurses and midwives. We also advise on how nurses and midwives should provide care to service users, their families and society.

Our functions in safeguarding the public involve:

- establishing and maintaining both the register of nurses and midwives and the candidate register;
- establishing procedures and criteria for assessment and registration in the registers;
- approving education programmes and further education programmes for the purposes of registration and continued registration; and
- keeping these programmes under review.

As the regulator for the professions, we also set standards of practice and provide support for registered nurses and midwives. This includes developing, publishing and reviewing:

- a code of professional conduct;
- guidance on all aspects of professional conduct and ethics; and
- guidance on maintaining professional competence.

We are responsible for investigating complaints against nurses and midwives and taking appropriate action with those whose practice has been found to be less than the required standard. This is carried out through the Fitness to Practise functions as prescribed in the Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011.

The Code of Professional Conduct for each Nurse and Midwife (2000) (currently under review) is the overarching structure that informs NMBI's framework of professional guidance to registered nurses and midwives. Professional accountability, competency and the quality of professional practice are based on this structure and other supporting guidance and standards frameworks.

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