

# GUIDELINE FOR PARTICIPATING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

## Preamble

Midwives shall at all times protect and maintain the confidentiality of client personal information consistent with CMBC Bylaws 79 and 83 and BC's *Personal Information and Privacy Act* (PIPA) and should not engage in any professional activity that would adversely affect the honour, dignity or credibility of the profession (CMBC *Code of Ethics*, Section 5).

Midwives have the professional and ethical responsibility to ensure that both they and their staff exercise care in the collection, use and disclosure of clients' personal information, regardless of format. They must also consider the professional, legal and ethical risks and liabilities of using the rapidly evolving social media and online networking technologies that allow individuals to connect, interact and share information over the internet through such portals as social networking sites, media-sharing sites, blogs, online forums, email, text message and multi-media message. Midwives should be aware that all means of electronic communication/ information can be retrieved and can be used in a court of law<sup>1</sup>.

When participating in social media sites or online networking forums and blogs, midwives must protect against any possibility that their clients' personal information could be revealed and consider any situation where their professional integrity and reputation could be undermined.

Midwives are responsible for ensuring that their practice follows provincial and federal privacy laws.

## Guidelines for Participating in Social Media

1. Read, understand, and use the strictest privacy settings to maintain control over access to personal information. Be aware that privacy settings can be compromised.
2. Treat social networking sites as virtual public spaces, accessible by the public. Avoid any discussion or comment with or about clients or care-related events, and keep health information confidential. Even without identifiers, descriptions of real case examples could compromise client privacy and confidentiality and could reasonably be seen as breaching client confidentiality.
3. Obtain a client's written permission prior to posting any personal information about them online.
4. Obtain a client's written permission prior to taking photographs which are intended for posting online.
5. Maintain professional boundaries to protect the client-midwife relationship. Avoid entering into dual relationships with clients. For example, do not initiate or accept an invitation to

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<sup>1</sup> [www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-5/page-12.html](http://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-5/page-12.html)

become personal online friends with clients or clients' family members at any time during the period when a client is under your care or, if you are already online friends with a client or clients' family member, do not discuss their care online. If you use social media with clients, consider using a professional account that is separate from your personal one.

6. Avoid the perception of establishing an online therapeutic relationship through the posting of midwifery advice directed to an individual within a discussion on the internet.
7. Exercise professional restraint in accessing client information through social media. Carefully manage client information acquired from legitimate health care related online sites or other sources.
8. Consider whether any postings on the internet could violate defamation, copyright or plagiarism laws.

**Develop clear, written protocols around the use of social media in your midwifery practice, and ensure all midwives and office staff are aware of the protocols.**

## References

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia. *Professional Standards and Guidelines – Social Media and Online Networking Forums*. 03/09/2012 <https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/pdf/PSG-Social-Media-and-Online-Networking-Forums.pdf>

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia <https://www.doctorsofbc.ca/resource-centre/physicians/managing-practice/privacy-toolkit>

College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia. *Practice Standard for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners – Privacy and Confidentiality*. October 2010 [www.crnbc.ca](http://www.crnbc.ca)

International Nurse Regulator Collaborative. *Social Media Use: Common Expectations for Nurses*. August 2014  
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