

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 and information can be used in a court of law¹.

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 ensure that their participation does not undermine their own integrity and reputation or that of the midwifery profession.

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

Guideline

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 and prior to taking photographs of the client which are intended for posting online.
4. Maintain professional boundaries to protect the client-midwife relationship. Avoid entering into personal relationships with clients through social media. For example, do not initiate or accept an invitation to 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

¹ www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-5/page-12.html

online. If you use social media with clients, consider using a professional account that is separate from your personal one.

5. Use caution when identifying yourself as a midwife online. Avoid the perception of establishing an online therapeutic relationship through the posting of midwifery advice directed to an individual or group within a discussion on the internet.
6. Exercise professional restraint in accessing client information through social media. Carefully manage client information acquired from online sources.
7. Consider whether any postings on the internet could violate defamation, copyright or plagiarism laws.
8. Ensure that your professional integrity is maintained at all times when participating in social media. Carefully consider the intention and possible consequences on your profession when sharing information about yourself and your practice as well as commenting on or “liking” someone else’s social media posts.

Midwives should develop clear, written protocols around the use of social media in their midwifery practice and ensure all midwives and office staff in the practice are aware of the protocols.

References

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia. *Professional Standards and Guidelines – Social Media*. April 2017 <https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/pdf/PSG-Social-Media.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*. April 2017 www.crnbc.ca

International Nurse Regulator Collaborative. *Social Media Use: Common Expectations for Nurses*. May 2017
<https://www.crnbc.ca/Standards/Lists/StandardResources/INRCSocialMediaUseCommonExpectforNurses.pdf>

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act of Canada <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/p-8.6/page-1.html#docCont>