

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

Midwives shall at all times protect and maintain the confidentiality of client personal information consistent with MRCNS Standards of Midwifery Practice (#8), MRCNS Code of Ethics (XVII) and Nova Scotia's *Personal Health Information Act* and should not engage in any professional activity that would adversely affect the honour, dignity, or credibility of the profession.

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.¹ 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.
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. Even without identifiers, descriptions of real case examples could compromise client privacy and confidentiality and could reasonably be seen as breaching client confidentiality.

¹ *Canada Evidence Act*, <http://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-5/page-12.html>

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 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.
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.
9. Be aware of additional hospital or health authority requirements before using any social media tool for work purposes.

References:

College of Midwives of British Columbia, Guidelines for the Use of Social Media (2015)

College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia, Social Media Position Statement (2012)

Approved by the MRC on September 8, 2016