

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINE

Site Applicability

Applies to all Providence Health Care (PHC) sites and clinics.

Practice Level

Applies to all [Staff](#) employed by and affiliated with PHC, including medical staff, contracted employees, researchers, students and volunteers.

Statement

Staff must be aware of and follow all PHC policies related to social media, privacy, confidentiality and use of technology as well as any related professional and ethical standards.

Need to Know

As a health care organization, we encourage appropriate online communication with Social Media and mobile devices amongst our staff, medical staff, researchers and volunteers. Social Media used in Health Care can enable an efficient way for fostering engagement and expanding the current dialogue for improved, meaningful person-centered care and services. If used inappropriately, the same technology and resources may pose significant confidentiality and privacy risks to PHC and its staff, patients, residents, and families. Social Media can blur the boundaries between professional accountability and personal life.

Definition of Social Media: interactive social networks of communication, which include both internal PHC-affiliated, and external, non-PHC associated Social Media, in which the staff member's relationship to PHC is recognized, identified or assumed. These include, but are not limited to, email, blogs, Listservs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Smugmug, YouTube, online forums, wikis, text messaging, RSS feeds, video sharing, podcasts and other forms of online publishing or discussion.

This guideline defines acceptable conduct and practices in order to ensure that staff usage of Social Media:

- Is consistent with the reputation, mission, vision and values of PHC;
- Is consistent with existing PHC policies and guidelines (e.g. Standards of Conduct);
- Maintains professional boundaries and compliance with the professional and ethical obligations as

outlined by the respective Professional College or Association's commonly accepted standards and best practices;

- Maintains confidentiality, privacy and complies with [FIPPA](#) and other Provincial Laws.

Practice Guideline

Any new PHC or PHC-affiliated Social Media handle/channel (e.g. Instagram profile) or public space (e.g. Facebook group), representing a PHC program, department or staff group must be approved first by PHC Communications.

When using any Social Media:

- 1. Be Transparent:** Be honest about who you are, be thoughtful before posting and respect the community where you are posting.
 - When posting about PHC-related issues, acknowledge your title and affiliation with PHC and include a disclaimer such as: "The views I share are mine and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer." Be clear that you are not speaking on behalf of PHC.
 - Write in first person (e.g. use "I", "me", "mine" etc., **not** "we" or "our").
 - If you are offering your personal perspective on a topic related to PHC, be careful to ensure that your commentary and opinion does not have the potential to cause damage to PHC or its partners.
 - Do not post anything that would reflect poorly on yourself, your profession, or PHC.
 - Only authorized spokespeople may release information to the media or public on behalf of PHC and its programs as per the [PHC Media Policy](#).
 - Contact the Communications & Public Affairs team to ask about how to speak on behalf of PHC.
- 2. Use Your Time Wisely:** You are permitted to use Social Media and mobile devices (e.g. cellphones, smartphones, tablets, laptops) at work, for work purposes. Manage personal matters on time away from work or during approved breaks.
- 3. Be Safe:** Remember, our responsibility is to our patients and on-site duties, first and foremost.
 - Ensure that any information obtained from Social Media, mobile devices (e.g. apps), or the Internet (e.g. medical websites) used for patient care/education is from reliable and credible sources.
- 4. Be Accurate:** As with any information you provide and communicate at PHC, strive for accuracy when posting online.
 - Make comments that are within your scope of practice and do not provide information that may

- not be accurate (e.g. health information).
 - This is easier than issuing a retraction or an apology later, and maintains professional credibility.
 - If you cite content created by others, acknowledge it. Do not violate their copyright.
5. **Privacy:** Be aware that what you post online could potentially be shared with millions of people.
- Ensure your Social Media privacy settings are customized and adjusted according to how you want to share your information. Anyone could access your information if your settings are set to “low” or “public”.
 - Organize and add contacts to the appropriate type of Social Media (e.g. family, friends or professional groups).
6. **Confidentiality:** The exact same privacy rules apply to Social Media as they do to the workplace. Adhere to PHC’s privacy policy. Do not disclose Confidential or Personal information, or any information containing personal Identifiers, such as medical information, or any other information which could allow a specific person to be identified.
- Popular Social Media websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok), or email accounts (e.g. Gmail, Outlook) store information outside of Canada; confidential or personal information must not be shared in these ways as they breach the FIPPA.
7. **Security:** Ensure that your Social Media accounts and mobile devices are protected.
- Change passwords of mobile devices and Social Media accounts frequently, and uniquely.
 - Remember to sign out/log off after using your accounts.
 - Email is not a secure method of communication. Refer to the email policy.
 - Be aware of the risk of theft and consider where you are storing your mobile devices in the workplace.
8. **Personal Responsibility:** Critically think about your intentions and the possible consequences prior to posting online; you are personally responsible for what you publish. Your online comments are equal to if you physically said them in person. Be sure what you post is consistent with both your professional and ethical standards, and PHC’s values. Make sure any information you provide about PHC or PHC-related issues or partners is informed and factually accurate. If you wish to state your opinion, reiterate that it is *your* opinion and does not reflect that of your employer. Consider:
- **Who** might be reading your post? Is your posting suitable to be shared with anyone? Would it offend anyone?
 - **What** is the purpose of your post? What type of information are you sharing? Is this content beneficial or appropriate for the reputation of your profession, the organization or yourself?

- **When** are you accessing Social Media? Is this an appropriate time?
- **Where** are you posting this information? Is it appropriate for this specific social medium? (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- **Why** are you posting this information? Is it suitable for the world, and potentially your manager or patient to see? Could this post be communicated in another way?
- **How** would this post affect your relationship with others that might read your posting? How would others react to your online posting? How do you want to connect with them?

9. Keep Your Cool: Do not “react” immediately if you read something that gets you emotional; think carefully before posting online.

- Everything posted online is archived forever, even if you delete it.
- Use suitable communication channels for discussing, sharing or reporting workplace issues, instead of publicly online.

10. Respect: Be respectful and professional with your communication and tone.

- How you make comments and interact online not only affects the reputation, confidence and trust of your profession or organization, but also reflects on your character.
- “Liking” an individual’s disrespectful comment on Facebook is the same as if you repeated it.
- Do not use false, unprofessional online personas.
- If using mobile devices or accessing Social Media for clinical care in front of patients or families, maintain professionalism and explain what you are doing.
- Follow the professional and ethical standards of practice as outlined by your College or Association.

11. If you made a mistake: Acknowledge the error as soon as possible and fix it.

- Correct the online posting as soon as you can (e.g. remove comment/picture with confidential data, referencing the original source), and make it clear that you are fixing an earlier error.
- Correcting errors and taking responsibility promotes trust.

Please contact the Communications & Public Affairs team for assistance, or for any potential issues that might need an official PHC response. Issues can be resolved more effectively if they are quickly acknowledged. When in doubt, ask!

PHC Social Media

[Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Youtube](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#)

Education

- College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO): [Social Media: Reflect Before You Post](#)
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBM): [Social Media use in Health Care](#)
- Transport Canada: [Social Media at Work](#)

Related Documents

[Acceptable Use of Information Technology](#)

[Cellular Phone and Smartphones](#)

[Emailing](#)

[Information Privacy & Confidentiality](#)

[Information Security](#)

[Internet Access](#)

[Managing Privacy Breaches](#)

[Media Relations](#)

[Respect at Work](#)

[Social Media](#) (Policy)

[Standards of Conduct](#)

[Wireless \(WiFi\) Network](#)

References

Barton, A.J., Skiba, D.J. (2012). Creating Social Media policies for education and practice. NI2012:11th International Congress on Nursing Informatics.

BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

BCIT School of Health Science (March, 2012). Policy for use of Social Media technologies for health care providers.

Canadian Medical Association: Physician Guidelines for Online Communication with Patients.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (July, 2011). Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit: http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf

Cleveland Clinic Social Media Policy: http://my.clevelandclinic.org/social_media_policy.aspx

College of Licensed Practical Nurses of British Columbia Standards of Practice College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia Standards of Practice.

This material has been prepared solely for use at Providence Health Care (PHC). PHC accepts no responsibility for use of this material by any person or organization not associated with PHC. A printed copy of this document may not reflect the current electronic version.

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BC College of Nurses and Midwives [Social Media Policy](#).

Northern Health Authority, (November 1, 2010). Social Media Policy.

Vancouver Coastal Health (May 2, 2022). Social Media, Websites, and Online Communications policy.

Definitions

“Confidential Information” means any personal or Corporate-related, financial or administrative information. Includes information and data, in any form or medium, relating to PHC, its business, operations, activities, planning, personnel, labour relations, suppliers and finances that is not generally available to the public and information that is identified as Confidential Information in accordance with PHC policies.

“FIPPA” is the British Columbia [“Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act”](#), which prevents the unauthorized collection, use or disclosure of personal information by public bodies.

“Identifiers” means any information including, but not limited to the individual’s name, address and telephone number; the individual’s race, national or ethnic origin, colour, or religious or political beliefs or associations; the individual’s age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or family status; any identifying number, symbol, or other particular assigned to the individual; the individual’s fingerprints, blood type or inheritable characteristics; information about the individual’s health care history, including a physical or mental disability; information about the individual’s educational, financial, criminal or employment history; anyone else’s opinion about the individual; the individual’s personal views or opinions, except if they are about someone else.

“Organization” is defined as Providence Health Care (PHC).

“Personal Information” means any recorded information about an identifiable individual that can be linked back to or can identify a specific individual through association or inference (See Identifiers). These include, but are not limited to, patients/residents/clients, members of the public or Staff (see above definition). It does not include business contact information (e.g. person’s title, business telephone number, business address, email or facsimile number).

“Social Media” means interactive social networks of communication, which includes both internal PHC affiliated, and external, non-PHC associated Social Media, in which the staff member’s relationship to PHC is recognized, identified or assumed. These include, but are not limited to, email, blogs, Listservs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Smugmug, YouTube, online

forums, wikis, text messaging, RSS feeds, video sharing, podcasts and other forms of online publishing or discussion.

“Staff” means all employees (including management and leadership), medical staff (including physicians, midwives, dentists, and nurses), residents, fellows and trainees, health care professionals, students, volunteers, contractors, researchers and other service providers engaged by PHC.

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