PANB Social Media Guidelines

These guidelines have been prepared to give PANB members a framework for their use of social media. The PANB Board of Directors and its committees may use the guidelines as a reference when reviewing allegations of a member's professional misconduct involving the internet and social media.

Introduction

The PANB considers "Social Media" to mean internet-based tools that allow individuals to share information, ideas, images or other content and in some cases, to interact in real time.

Social media include but are not limited to the following:

- Social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, Twitter)
- Professional networking (LinkedIn)
- Media Sharing (YouTube, Flickr)
- Content production (blogs)
- Knowledge aggregation (Wikipedia)
- Virtual reality and gaming (Second Life)

Benefits and risks of the use of social media by health professionals

The PANB recognizes that social media offer a number of potential benefits for health professionals but also involve elements of risk, both professionally and personally.

Benefits include:

- Professional networking
- Professional education
- Organizational promotion
- Patient education
- Public health programs

Potential risks associated with improper use of social media include:

- Difficulty in verifying the quality and reliability of online information
- Potential damage to personal and professional image or reputation
- Potential breaches of patient or colleague confidentiality
- Potential violation of the patient-health care provider boundary
- Licensing or employment implications if online behavior violates professional standards
  - the right to freedom of speech is not usually deemed by professional bodies to override obligations to uphold standards of practice
  -employers may check social networking sites used by employees for inappropriate conduct

- Legal consequences of online statements that are deemed defamatory (libel/slander allegations) - posting anonymously or under a pseudonym does not protect an individual against the possible consequences of a breach of confidentiality or defamation

Guidelines for the use of social media by health professionals

To help decrease professional and personal risks in the use of social media, health care professionals should observe the following guidelines:

- Respect patient confidentiality - do not share confidential information or images: an unnamed person or patient may be identifiable from information posted online
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries when interacting in profession-related social networks - use the same standard of professionalism and ethical behavior that would apply in face-to-face interactions; inappropriate behavior or language may be deemed to violate professional standards of practice and may impact on one's professional standing or licensure
- Keep clear boundaries between your professional and personal social media use: becoming an online "friend" of a patient or communicating with them outside the clinical situation may extend the scope of your professional responsibility
- Do not post negative comments or share concerns online about your employer, colleagues or clients/patients; such comments may be deemed to violate explicit or implicit terms of employment and may result in punitive action or termination of employment
- Be transparent - identify yourself and any potential conflict of interest regarding the information or opinions you provide
- Respect others - observe the same rules of professional courtesy and choice of language as in face-face communications
- Protect your personal security by keeping personal information private and by creating strong passwords

References

- Canadian Nurses Protective Society, infoLAW - Social Media [www.cnps.ca]
- Canadian Medical Protective Association, Top 10 tips for using social media in professional practice, Originally published October 2014 [www.cmpa-acpm.ca/advice-publications]