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# **SOCIAL MEDIA**

**Advisory for Members of the  
College of Chiropodists of Ontario**

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**College of Chiropodists of Ontario**

**180 Dundas St. West, Suite 1901  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8  
T: 416.542.1333 F: 416.542.1666  
Toll-Free: 1.877.232.7653 [www.cocoo.on.ca](http://www.cocoo.on.ca)**

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## **Introduction**

Social media is a powerful tool for communicating and networking and has become pervasive in all aspects of our lives, personal and professional. This is especially true during global crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic we are currently experiencing. Various social media platforms, such as Facebook (especially the group discussion forums), Twitter, and Instagram, have become sources of information, innovative ideas for clinical practice and coping strategies, networking and social and emotional support. For Members of the College, social media can be useful for:

- Advertising
- Educating the public and promoting foot health
- Networking with other Members or members of other colleges
- Sharing of ideas
- Professional development opportunities (e.g. conferences, webinars)
- Discussing challenging and/or interesting issues
- Gathering news, whether it's global, local and/or professional

As health care professionals, the opportunities to reach out, dialogue, inform, educate and learn online are tremendous. But Members ought to be cautious in their use of the social media, which presents unique challenges, including but not limited to, maintaining patient confidentiality and professional boundaries in an environment that is inherently public and not secure.

## **The Role of the College in Guiding Professional Practice**

The role of the College in regulating the profession is to ensure the core principles, standards, and relevant legislation are interpreted and applied to practice and to conduct, including within the social media environment. For example, issues related to confidentiality and privacy, professional behaviour, consent, advertising standards, etc.

Where there are many benefits of social media, as indicated above, those benefits need to balance against the obligations to protect the interest of the public and ensure professional, ethical behaviour and relationships are maintained.

## **Informed Consent**

Members are accountable for ensuring health information is not collected, used, or disclosed without the informed consent of the patient. When interacting with the public and/or other members of the College using social media platforms, the Member must be mindful and adhere to their professional obligations under, among others, the Health Care Consent Act, the [Personal Health Information Protection Act \(PHIPA\)](#), and the [College's Standards](#) (including, in particular, the Patient Relations Standard).

## **Tips and Advice for Social Media Use**

The College offers Members the following tips and advice when participating in social media:<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Don't Lie**

Members must only share information online that is true, not misleading, and/or obtained from credible sources. Members must always fact-check before posting or disseminating information. Members should always consider whether the information they are sharing is helpful to the reader or whether it will propagate unnecessary fear, panic and misinformation. Additionally, Members should always retract or correct any inaccurate comments or information they have shared.

### **2. Don't Pry**

Members are prohibited from seeking personal or sensitive information about patients, patients' family members or friends. Doing so may constitute professional misconduct and/or a breach of the College's Standards.

### **3. Can't Delete**

Most social media "posts" are searchable and very difficult to eliminate from the cyber-world. Therefore, Members should always "pause before you post" and consider whether what they are sharing online is helpful or harmful to others. In addition, Members could consider if what they are posting is targeting another individual or an identifiable group and could be considered as discriminatory, bigotry, offensive, cyber-bullying and/or unprofessional.

### **4. Don't Steal, Don't Reveal**

Members should never share information that is confidential or proprietary. When sharing credible information online, Members should always cite and give credit to its source.

## **Discussion Group/Forum Moderation**

For Members that are also moderators of social media groups/forums related to the profession, it is their responsibility to ensure all of the aforementioned principles and advice are followed and upheld in their respective platforms. Moderators should develop policies and guidelines for participation and communicate them clearly to their users. Moderators should enforce these policies and guidelines and act accordingly should there be violations or breaches.

## **Professional Image**

Information, pictures and/or opinions posted on social media platforms and the internet are permanent. Negative or unprofessional images and/or statements by Members are harmful to the reputation of the profession and undermine patient or public trust.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the "12-Word Social Media Policy" by the Mayo Clinic Social Media Network  
[https://www.hrreporter.com/DynamicData/AttachedDocs/facebook-refcheck-PRINT%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.hrreporter.com/DynamicData/AttachedDocs/facebook-refcheck-PRINT%20(2).pdf)

*“It is absolutely crucial to remember that anything you post online may stay there forever, in one form or another, so think carefully before you post – post information with eyes wide open, and consider the potential risks to their employment – current and future. Whether through the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine Site or the caches of Google and Yahoo, old versions of websites are indeed searchable by those ‘in the know’. What is actually found may include your own posted material, as well as information about you posted by others.”*

– Dr. Ann Cavoukian, the former Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario  
and one of the world’s leading privacy experts

### Other Helpful Resources

- 1) Canadian Medical Protective Association – Top 10 tips for using social media in professional practice: <https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/advice-publications/browse-articles/2014/top-10-tips-for-using-social-media-in-professional-practice>
- 2) How to use social media in healthcare: a guide for health professionals: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-health-care/>
- 3) Social Media and Health Care Professionals: Benefits, Risks and Best Practices: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4103576/>
- 4) How to be an Effective Social Media Moderator (LinkedIn): <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-effective-social-media-moderator-jay-majumdar>
- 5) Social Media – Embracing the Opportunities, Averting the Risks: [https://www.nasba.org/app/uploads/2011/03/Social\\_Media\\_Policy\\_Article\\_Presentation-Aug09.pdf](https://www.nasba.org/app/uploads/2011/03/Social_Media_Policy_Article_Presentation-Aug09.pdf)
- 6) Social Media Toolkit for Ontario Public Health Units (Feb 2014): <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/L/2014/ldcp-social-media-toolkit.pdf?la=en>
- 7) The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit: [https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit\\_bm.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf)