

Social Media Guidelines for Paramedic Practitioners

Purpose

To provide some general rules and guidelines for paramedic practitioners when using social media professionally and personally.

Introduction

Utilizing social media in our professional and personal lives has become commonplace; however, concerns can arise when used without a certain level of professionalism. Referencing the current Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, the Social Media Guide for Paramedic Practitioners will provide members of the Alberta College of Paramedics with some general rules and guidelines to follow when using social media applications.

One of the overarching roles of EMRs and paramedics is to provide safe and ethical patient-centered care. Responsibility to the patient includes not only providing the best possible care but maintaining professional boundaries and ensuring the dignity, safety, privacy and confidentiality of the patient. This applies in everyday practice but also applies online.

Key Points

- Professional Boundaries
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Professionalism
- Collaboration
- Personal devices

“Act respectfully in a manner that upholds the patient’s dignity, safety, privacy, confidentiality and decision-making; taking into account the patient’s rights, needs, culture and environmental context”

1.1 Act respectfully, Code of Ethics

Professional Boundaries

Maintain appropriate professional relationship boundaries. Avoid friending, liking, following or connecting with patients and/or their families on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Hangouts, LinkedIn, Snapchat, etc.

A power imbalance exists between paramedics and patients, and the maintenance of clear professional boundaries is important to the integrity of the professional-patient relationship and protects patients from exploitation.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Maintaining a level of privacy and confidentiality is a key area that falls under the responsibility to the patient and colleagues.

Tip: Do not share any identifiable information about patients on social media.

It is important to note that all activity online, despite privacy settings, may be public and accessible by everyone including patients, colleagues and supervisors. Breaches of patient confidentiality online can have far wider implications because of the reach of social media and permanency of digital information.

Tip: If you wouldn't share information with someone face to face, do not post on social media.

Professionalism

Paramedics are regulated under the *Health Professions Act* and are required to adhere to a Standards of Practice and a Code of Ethics in both their professional and personal lives.

When posting on social media, consider: how will it reflect on you as a practitioner? How will it reflect on the paramedicine profession?

"A regulated member must maintain professional boundaries with patients at all times and in any interaction"

2.5 Professional Boundaries, Standards of Practice

"Ensure appropriate professional boundaries by respecting the inherent power imbalance that occurs between a patient and their healthcare provider, maintaining clear separation between professional and personal relationships."

1.5 Ensure appropriate professional boundaries, Code of Ethics

Ensure comments made on social media about the profession of paramedicine, individuals within the College and the College are factual and professional.

Avoid disparaging comments about colleagues, patients, employers, healthcare organizations, etc. This kind of online interaction will firstly reflect negatively on you as an EMR or paramedic and secondly on the paramedicine field.

Tip: If you post something you should not have, delete and discuss with your supervisor or contact the College for direction.

Tip: When interacting on social media be wary of your surroundings and any identifying information like uniform, workplace, logos, etc. Consider the implications of identifying yourself on social media.

"unprofessional conduct" means one or more of the following, whether or not it is disgraceful or dishonourable: conduct that harms the integrity of the regulated profession;"

section 1 (1) (pp) (xii), Health Professions Act

Collaboration

The College realizes that to discuss and/or explain a patient's injuries with other healthcare practitioners taking photos may be necessary; however, avoid using a personal mobile device, if possible, as it can present a number of complications for the practitioner.

Tip: Obtain permission, if possible, when taking photos and delete these photos once they are no longer needed.

Personal devices

Paramedicine is unique in that practitioners rarely work in offices and may rely on mobile technology to stay in contact with supervisors. If possible, avoid using personal devices during shifts. The College recognizes that this may be difficult due to the work environments.

If you still have questions about using social media, appropriately contact the College's Practice department at practice@ABparamedics.com.