



Position Statement

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Social Networking by Emergency Nurses

Description

Social media is a collective term for electronic communication such as websites and applications for social networking. Interactions through social platforms enable users to create online communities to share information, engage in discussion, post personal messages, and disseminate other content (Cathala et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2022).

Social networking can benefit healthcare workers in a variety of ways. Social networking can build, maintain, and enhance professional relationships through support networks and create possibilities for discussion, research, and exchange of experiences with other healthcare professionals. Social networks also provide opportunities for rapid exchange of knowledge (Gagne et al., 2021; National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN], 2018; Price et al., 2018). Conversely, the unregulated nature of social media creates a possibility for the sharing of unethical, illegal, or incorrect content by emergency nurses, which may result in violations of hospital confidentiality policies and federal laws. Detrimental effects may occur if emergency nurses are not cautious with their postings or compliant with confidentiality and privacy obligations (Daigle, 2020; Geraghty et al., 2021; Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2022). Thus, emergency nurses are obligated to not share any information that includes photographs or specific details that could possibly identify a co-worker, patient, or specific patient scenario without appropriate consent from all involved parties.

ENA Position

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) that:

1. Emergency nurses respect each individual's right to privacy and confidentiality and do not transmit or post any information online or through social networks that could identify a colleague, patient, or a specific patient event without the individual's express consent.
2. Emergency nurses take part in the development of institutional policies regarding the use of social media and social platforms.
3. Emergency nurses adhere to institutional policies and legal and ethical obligations regarding the use of social media to protect the privacy of individuals, whether online or offline.
4. Emergency nurses who are aware of potentially unethical, illegal, or incorrect content posted or shared on any social network or platform have an ethical duty to follow their institution's policies and their professional code of conduct to report breaches of patient confidentiality or the promulgation of incorrect or misleading healthcare information.

5. Nurses who interact with patients on social media observe the patient–nurse boundaries that are prescribed in their professional code of ethics.

Background

The use of social media is expanding rapidly as individuals and organizations increasingly embrace user-generated content (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2022). The diversity of social media platforms and methods of posting enable a new level of connection between patients, healthcare workers, and professionals. Social media has also influenced the manner in which nursing education is being delivered (O'Connor, et al., 2018; Ramage & Moorley, 2019; Scott & Goode, 2020). In fact, the high usage rate of social media by nursing students has motivated the adaptation of clinical curricula to reflect the changing habits and culture of adult learners (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). If used responsibly and appropriately, social networks and platforms can offer several benefits for nurses and nursing students including the following:

- Building and maintaining professional relationships
- Establishing or accessing nursing support networks
- Discussing specific issues, interests, research, and clinical experiences with other healthcare professionals, nationally and globally
- Accessing resources for continuing professional development

The ease with which information can be distributed presents challenges to both privacy and professionalism (Alharbi et al. 2022; ENA, 2023; Griffen et al, 2021; Ramage & Moorley, 2019). Healthcare professionals have an ethical duty to maintain professional standards (ENA, 2023; Griffen et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019) and be aware that their postings may end up in the public domain and remain there, regardless of the privacy of the initial posting or the poster's intent (Geraghty et al., 2021). Posting may include information that seems anonymous on the surface but, when connected with other publicly accessible information, can be used to identify a patient. Posting sensitive information or negative comments about a patient or an employer online poses hazards for the poster, even if the posting does not seem to breach regulations set by law. Nurses have been disciplined for healthcare-associated social media posts that were technically within the bounds of privacy laws, but which breached other contractual agreements set forth by their institutions (Maciura & Wade, 2019; Parker et al., 2019).

It is equally important that clinical information found on social media be verified via a reliable source. Social media can be easily distributed, created by anybody, and effortlessly accessed. Misinformation can spread quickly and widely. Multiple sources may be necessary to verify authenticity of facts, and emergency nurses have the ability to decipher what sources are deemed trustworthy. The nursing profession is one of the most trusted professions (Saad, 2022). It is essential that emergency nurses be reminded that their profession and place of employment can easily be affected by posting negative information about patients, colleagues, and the healthcare organizations (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, 2019).

Resources

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