



# **Social Media Use:** Guideline for Registered Psychiatric Nurses

---

Approved: March 7, 2025

Effective: April 7, 2025



**CRPNS**  
COLLEGE OF  
REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES  
OF SASKATCHEWAN

Under the [Registered Psychiatric Nurses Act](#), the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRPNS) is legally responsible to protect the public by regulating members of the psychiatric nursing profession in Saskatchewan.

Copyright © College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Saskatchewan, 2025

This document may be reproduced, either in part or in its entirety, for personal or educational purposes without prior authorization, provided the following conditions are met:

- Careful attention must be given to ensure the accuracy of the reproduced materials;
- The source, CRPNS, must be explicitly acknowledged;
- Any alterations made to the content must be clearly delineated; and
- The reproduction must not be presented or implied as an official rendition of the original materials.

Reference of this guideline to any specific commercial products, process, or service by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise, does not constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favouring by the CRPNS.

Other requests for commercial or for-profit redistribution of this document in whole or part should be in writing and addressed to:

**CRPNS**

#205 – 4401 Albert Street  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
S4S 6B6 Canada

OR

[info@CRPNS.ca](mailto:info@CRPNS.ca)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is with great appreciation that we acknowledge the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRNS), British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives (BCCNM), College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta (CRPNA), College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM), Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB), the College and Association of Nurses of the North West Territories and Nunavut (CANNN), the Nova Scotia College of Nurses (NSCN), the College of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (CRNNL), and the College of Registered Nurses and Midwives of PEI (CRNMPEI) whose work has contributed significantly to the development of this guideline.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of CRPNS practice guidelines is to help Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) be aware of the requirements and obligations of specific aspects of registered psychiatric nursing practice. Practice guidelines provide more specific information related to RPN responsibilities and are intended to complement information outlined in The Registered Psychiatric Nurses Act, other legislation, CRPNS Bylaws, Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice, Code of Ethics, and other resources that support professional psychiatric nursing practice.

This guideline establishes the baseline expectations for RPNs' use of social media and their online presence. RPNs have professional, ethical, and legal obligations to provide safe care to the public, and must ensure their online behavior reflects the trustworthiness and integrity expected of the profession (BCCNM, 2025).

While this guideline does not seek to limit freedom of expression, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining professional accountability, protecting patient privacy, and safeguarding the integrity of the psychiatric nursing profession. RPNs have the right to share their thoughts and experiences online but must do so in a manner that avoids ethical breaches, protects confidentiality, and ensures that the public's trust in the profession remains intact (CRNS, 2021; CRNMPEI, 2023; NSCN, 2024).

## INTRODUCTION

Social media encompasses a range of private and public online platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange content, engage in discussions, build communities and collaborate with others. In the context of psychiatric nursing care, social media is commonly being used as a tool for sharing evidence-based knowledge, health related education and communication, while also facilitating the sharing of resources, experiences, and networking within the healthcare field (Geraghty et al., 2021).

Maintaining professionalism online requires careful consideration of privacy, ethical responsibilities and professional accountability. Before sharing or engaging with online content, it is important to reflect on how a post aligns with professional standards, whether it upholds the integrity of the psychiatric nursing profession, and if there is potential for it to be misinterpreted or cause harm.

An electronic footprint is the trail of information a person leaves behind when using the internet (Government of Canada, 2024). This includes interactions with other social media posts, comments, sharing, and even deleted content. For RPNs, an electronic footprint is especially important to consider, as anything shared online has the potential to be traced, archived, or taken out of context, potentially affecting professional credibility and employment (Canadian Nurses Protective Society [CNPS], 2021b). Even private accounts and seemingly harmless interactions, such as 'likes', contribute to this footprint. Understanding that online activity is often permanent underscores the need for mindful and responsible engagement on digital platforms.

## RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PSYCHIATRIC NURSING

With the increasing use, availability, and widespread distribution of social media content also comes the increased need for a cautious approach and attentiveness related to the risks, particularly for those working in healthcare (CNPS, 2021b). RPNs must be vigilant about maintaining client confidentiality and avoiding the disclosure of information that can breach client privacy. Posts that violate professional boundaries and ethical standards, such as sharing client related details, unprofessional behavior that reflects poorly on both the individual RPN and the profession, could potentially result in legal and regulatory repercussions. RPNs must always be mindful of how they present themselves online, ensuring their social media activity aligns with the ethical and professional standards of their practice. When used carelessly by healthcare providers social media use poses significant risk to client and population health (Jain et al., 2024; Ventola, 2014).

### BEFORE YOU POST – Ask yourself:

- Is this the right vehicle to share my thoughts?
- Is this information credible and does it benefit the public?
- Does this reflect my professionalism as a trusted RPN?
- Does the post reflect health related facts and/or evidence from trusted qualified sources, or does it reflect my opinion?
- Will this post reflect poorly on my profession, colleagues, employer, or others?
- Would it be acceptable for me to say this face to face or in a room full of clients, colleagues or my family?
- Have I considered how my post/comment/interaction might be misinterpreted without tone or context?
- Will this post violate my standards of practice, or a condition of my employment?

(NSCN, 2024).

## PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATIONS

### PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS:

Professionalism and ethical decision making in psychiatric nursing extends to all aspects of practice, including the use of social media. An RPN's social media accounts has the potential to be perceived as a reflection of both their personal and professional lives (CRPNA, 2021). It is important to avoid posting anything that could harm clients, colleagues, the employer, or the psychiatric nursing profession, and to always adhere to workplace policies and regulatory guidelines when engaging online. An RPNs professional conduct on social media reflects their commitment to ethical practice and helps maintain the public's trust in the care they provide.

### INTEGRITY AND TRUST:

Trust is the foundation of the therapeutic relationship and essential for upholding ethical standards in all aspects of care (Geraghty et al., 2021; NCSBN, 2024). Similarly, integrity is what sustains trust between healthcare professionals and the public, ensuring that actions and decisions are aligned with the values and responsibilities of the profession. However, irresponsible use of social media introduces risks that can threaten both trust and integrity, as online behaviors may conflict with professional conduct and has the potential to erode public confidence and trust in healthcare providers (Jain et al., 2024).

RPNs must act in a way that maintains integrity and respect the privacy of clients, colleagues, and co-workers by carefully managing information obtained from social media or other online sources. Client information must only be collected, used, and disclosed through appropriate channels that adhere to privacy legislation, professional practice standards, and employer requirements, ensuring the preservation of trust in the psychiatric nursing profession (CRPNA, 2021). RPNs must always exercise caution when searching online for information about clients, colleagues, or co-workers, as this could inappropriately bias interactions and compromise both ethical boundaries, and the trust essential to professional relationships. Additionally, there is a risk that the information found may lack credibility and could be false or misleading (Jain et al., 2024).

### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Confidentiality and privacy are interconnected but are distinct concepts: privacy refers to a client's right and expectation to be treated with dignity and respect, while confidentiality involves the protection and safeguarding of their personal information (NCSBN, 2024). This is important to consider when engaging online because if clients fear that their personal information will be shared without their consent to those not having a legitimate "need to know", they may withhold critical details that compromise the quality of care they



receive and cause further fracturing to the RPN-client relationship (NCSBN, 2024). RPNs are responsible for safeguarding all personal information collected during the therapeutic relationship, ensuring it is kept confidential and secure (CNPS, 2021a). This information may only be shared with other authorized members of the healthcare team when necessary for the purpose of providing care, in accordance with legal and ethical guidelines (BCCNM, 2024; CANN, 2024; NANB, 2022).

Client confidentiality or privacy breaches can occur both intentionally and accidentally, and they can take many forms. Individually identifiable information includes any data related to an individual's past, present, or future physical or mental health, or any information that could reasonably be used to identify the individual (CNPS, 2021b; NCSBN, 2024).

RPNs have an ethical and legal obligation to maintain client privacy and confidentiality at all times and must understand that posting under an "alias" or "anonymously" does not protect them from being accountable to this requirement (CNPS, 2021b; CRNS, 2021; NANB, 2022; Ventola, 2014).

### **Breach of confidentiality examples:**

- Posting photos of clients, including blurred/blacked out features or cropped photos
- Posting about a client's death
- Complaining about a client online
- Taking photos on a personal cellphone
- Commenting on a post and referencing a client by nickname, room number, diagnosis or condition
- Posting details about a work-based incident

## BOUNDARIES AND MISUSE:

Just like in face-to-face interactions, RPNs have a responsibility to establish, communicate, and maintain professional boundaries with clients in the online environment (CANNN, 2024; NCSBN, 2024). Without careful attention to privacy, tone, and context when using social media, RPNs may inadvertently cross professional boundaries, leading to misinterpretation or confusion (Ventola, 2014).

When identifying as a RPN online, whether in a biography section, a specific post, a photo, or a comment, there is an immediate connection created between ones' personal and professional life, which may lead to the perception that the RPN is acting in a professional capacity, resulting in blurring of professional boundaries. RPNs must maintain clear boundaries between personal and professional accounts, ensuring they are secure, and carefully consider how their posts or responses may be perceived by others (CANNN, 2024; CRPNA, 2021). Furthermore, engaging with clients through social media or other online channels can lead to boundary crossings and violations (CNPS, 2021b; Geraghty et al., 2021). RPNs must avoid establishing personal, social relationships with clients and creating a dual relationship, as identified in the CRPNS [Boundaries in the Therapeutic Relationship Guideline](#) (CRPNS, 2024).

Sharing unverified health advice through social media can mislead clients and contribute to unsafe practices (CNPS, 2021b). RPNs must exercise critical thinking and digital literacy skills to effectively navigate social media content, carefully assess information sources, and use trustworthy resources, while maintaining professional boundaries and adhering to privacy requirements (Jain et al., 2024). Therefore, while social media holds great potential as a tool for healthcare professionals, it must always be used with caution to prioritize client safety and uphold professional boundaries.



**Reasons to avoid the use of social media to provide professional advice:**

- Nurses are responsible for maintaining professional boundaries.
- Privacy and confidentiality are not adequately safeguarded over social media platforms.
- Providing advice to friends and family may lead to a conflict of interest and dual relationships.
- Informal exchanges may lead to the inadequate collection of personal health information.
- Informal exchanges may lead the recipient to rely on the information provided as a professional opinion.
- The nurse may inadvertently establish a therapeutic relationship with the recipient of the information.
- If a therapeutic relationship is established, the exchange over social media may not be properly retained in the patient's medical record.
- Social media platforms generally deprive the nurse of the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive assessment, including verification of the patient's identity or a thorough physical examination.

(CNPS, 2021b)

Sharing inappropriate content, defamatory statements, derogatory comments, racism, or client information—intentionally or unintentionally—can damage an RPN's reputation and the overall credibility of the profession, breach client confidentiality, and jeopardize client safety, leading to the potential for professional and legal consequences.

## RISK MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Exercise caution – pause before posting.
- Review and adjust your privacy and security settings.
- Periodically review and audit your own social media accounts for content that could potentially conflict with your professional responsibilities or be misinterpreted by others.
- Refrain from posting on social media impulsively or in anger.
- Carefully consider the potential risks of sharing negative, critical, or harmful comments about clients, colleagues, and employers.
- Do not use disparaging, discriminatory, or demeaning language.
- Do not post content that could suggest you are incapable of providing unbiased care.
- Address concerns with your employer or colleagues privately, rather than posting them on social media, to prevent online conduct from crossing into professional misconduct (CRNS, 2021; NANB, 2022; NSCN, 2024).
- Be accountable to all relevant professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities.
- Keep professional and personal social media accounts separate.
- Familiarize yourself with employer policies on social media use.
- Understand that identifying as a healthcare professional online may lead others to perceive you as acting within your professional capacity.
- Do not offer specific health-related advice in response to questions or comments on social media, as an appropriate therapeutic RPN-client relationship has not been established.
- Consider if your post balances the right to express your personal concerns and opinions with the responsibility to avoid compromising the public's trust in the psychiatric nursing profession (NANB, 2022; NSCN, 2024).
- Do not speak on behalf of your employer or the profession unless authorized to do so (NCSBN, 2024).
- Do not accept or initiate “friend” or “follower” requests to current or former clients.
- Do not engage with client family members, friends, or others who inquire about a client's care or health status (NANB, 2022).
- Ensure that all advertising is ethical, truthful, respects client privacy, and complies with applicable legislation and regulatory standards and guidelines.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE AN INAPPROPRIATE POST?

Every RPN has a duty to address conduct that does not meet the standards of practice and code of ethics. If you see an inappropriate post the first action is to address it with the RPN, or their employer directly if you feel comfortable doing so. You can also contact the appropriate regulatory body.

## CONCLUSION

Professional standards guide RPNs in their in-person interactions with clients, colleagues, and the public. RPNs are expected to uphold the same level of professionalism in digital spaces as they would in face-to-face encounters. This means maintaining respect, integrity, and ethical conduct in all online interactions—whether through social media, professional forums, or any other digital platforms (CNPS, 2021b). Furthermore, online behavior must reflect the values of the psychiatric nursing profession, promoting positive interactions with colleagues and the general public. Just as in the physical healthcare setting, RPNs' online presence must contribute to building trust, enhancing communication, and fostering a respectful, professional image that aligns with the high standards of the profession.

## REFERENCES

- British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives (BCCNM). (2025). Social Media. <https://www.bccnm.ca/RPN/learning/socialmedia/Pages/default.aspx>
- College and Association of Nurses of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut (CANNN). (2024). Social Media. <https://cannn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Social-Media-SOP.pdf>
- Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS). (2021a). InfoLAW: Privacy. <https://cnps.ca/article/privacy/>
- Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS). (2021b). InfoLAW: Social Media. <https://cnps.ca/article/social-media/>
- College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM). (2018). Social Media and Social Networking. <https://crnm.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Social-Media-and-Networking.pdf>
- College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta (CRPNA). (2021). Guidelines for Nurses: Social media and e-professionalism. <https://www.crpna.ab.ca/CRPNAMember/Library/CRPNAMember/Library/Library.aspx?hkey=6e8e7f1c-567e-48b8-aadb-b52c979aa3e1#:~:text=Collaborative%20Nursing%20Documents>
- College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRPNS). (2024). Boundaries in the Therapeutic Relationship: Guideline for registered psychiatric nurses. <https://crpns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/RPNAS-Boundaries-in-the-Therapeutic-Relationship-Guidelines.pdf>
- College of Registered Nurses and Midwives of Prince Edward Island (CRNMPEI). (2023). Practice Directive: Social media. <https://crnpei.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Practice-Directive-Social-Media-2023-09-15.pdf>
- College of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (CRNNL). (2013). Social Media. <https://crnnl.ca/site/uploads/2021/09/social-media.pdf>
- College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRNS). (2021). Social Media. <https://www.crns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Social-Media-SRNA-Resource.pdf>
- Geraghty, S., Hari, R., & Oliver, K. (2021). Using social media in contemporary nursing: risks and benefits. *British journal of nursing (Mark Allen Publishing)*, 30(18), 1078–1082. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2021.30.18.1078>
- Government of Canada. (2024). Digital Footprint. <https://www.cyber.gc.ca/en/guidance/digital-footprint-itsap00133>

Jain, M., Sharma, P. K., Kamboj, K., & Shyam, A. (2024). The Impact of Social Media on Medical Education and Health-care Communication. *Journal of orthopaedic case reports*, 14(9), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.13107/jocr.2024.v14.i09.4706>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB). (2022). Practice Guideline: Social media. [https://nanb.nb.ca/media/documents/NANB-PracticeGuideline-SocialMedia-August\\_22-E.pdf](https://nanb.nb.ca/media/documents/NANB-PracticeGuideline-SocialMedia-August_22-E.pdf)

Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN). (2024). Social Media Practice Guideline. [https://www.nscn.ca/sites/default/files/documents/resources/Social\\_Media.pdf](https://www.nscn.ca/sites/default/files/documents/resources/Social_Media.pdf)

National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). (2024). A Nurse's Guide to the Use of Social Media. [https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/NCSBN\\_SocialMedia.pdf](https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/NCSBN_SocialMedia.pdf)

Ventola C. L. (2014). Social media and health care professionals: benefits, risks, and best practices. *P & T: a peer-reviewed journal for formulary management*, 39(7), 491–520.