

Dalhousie University Faculty of Health Professions

Guidelines for the Student Use of Social Media and Electronic Communication in Practice Education Settings

Overview

The following guidelines provide a general overview of the professional responsibilities of Faculty of Health Professions students during practice education experiences. Although these guidelines are specific to social media and electronic communication, the general guidance applies to all forms of communication about practice education experiences, whether electronic or not.

In Nova Scotia, the collection, use, disclosure, retention, disposal and destruction of personal health information is governed by the [Personal Health Information Act \(PHIA\)](#). This Act is foundational for all health professionals and it is a requirement for all Faculty of Health Professions students to read and understand the Act.

These guidelines are intended to complement the PHIA as well as the [Dalhousie Student Code of Conduct](#), [Dalhousie's Social Media Guidelines](#), applicable School/College directives for professional behaviour while on placement and individual practice education employer policies on privacy, harassment, media relations and social media use. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with applicable legislation, rules, regulations and guidelines. Failure to do so will not be an acceptable excuse for inappropriate behaviour during practice education experiences. Students must be aware that behaviour contrary to the requirements of those documents could lead to disciplinary action by Dalhousie, termination and failure of your placement or even legal action (in the case of breaching health information legislation).

Definitions

For the purposes of these guidelines:

Electronic Communication and Social Media includes interaction between students and preceptors/clinical instructors, students and patients/clients, students and other health professionals, students in public or semi-public fora and between students before, during or after practice education experiences.

Practice Education includes all instances where Faculty of Health Professions students are employed or engaged to undertake work for an employer as part of their degree. This includes both direct patient/client care and observational experiences.

Practice Education Employer refers to any organization in which a student of the Faculty of Health Professions completes an internship, clinical or co-operative education experience as part of their educational program with Dalhousie University.

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Social Media is defined as any web-based fora where users interact online and share information. Social media sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Google+, blogs, Youtube, LinkedIn etc.

Electronic Communication refers to the use of any personal electronic communication mediums (such as email) and personal mobile devices (such as cell phones, smart phones, tablets) for sending and receiving messages, texts, emails or other information.

Guidelines for Responsible Student Use of Social Media and Electronic Communication in Practice Education Settings¹

General Guidelines

1. Consider the privacy of patients first. Everything that is written and spoken about a patient is confidential.
2. Be respectful. When communicating electronically, conduct yourself as you would in a professional face-to-face environment: with a respectful demeanor and attention to proper etiquette and language.
3. No social media. Students are prohibited from posting photos or discussing any aspect of their practical education experience on social media (students should check with their School regarding posting practice education sites on their LinkedIn resume).
4. Not at work. During work hours, ensure that any personal mobile devices are put away and on silent mode. Do not engage in personal business during work hours – this includes taking or making phone calls, texting and using social media.
5. Think before you send. Before engaging in online communication or posting photos, ask yourself if it would reflect poorly upon you, Dalhousie or your profession. If so, refrain from doing so.
6. Once something is public, you can't take it back. All information sent or posted electronically is permanent and may be accessible to the public even after it is deleted. Also, consider that it is always possible to find the author of information posted in electronic interactions and fora.
7. Protect your privacy. Ensure that all privacy settings in your accounts are set at a high level. This is for your own privacy, but also to protect others.

¹ These guidelines have been informed by those in place in other health professions' education programs across Canada, including the [British Columbia Institute of Technology \(BCIT\) School of Nursing](#), the [University of Saskatchewan School of Physical Therapy](#), and the [University of Manitoba Medical School](#).

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Guidelines for Interacting with Patients/Clients

1. Always maintain professional boundaries in all workplace relationships. Do not contact patients/clients on a personal mobile device or via social media. While a Faculty of Health Professions' student, developing non-professional relationships on social media sites with patients/clients or their families is prohibited.
2. Do not post photos or information or discuss specific details about patients/clients or patient/client-based learning experiences, even if unnamed or seemingly anecdotal.
3. Do not comment upon or criticize patients/clients (even if unnamed) in online fora.
4. Do not exchange private emails (nor email addresses), text messages or photos with or about patients/clients. All electronic correspondence with patients/clients should be done from a work or school email (as determined by your employer).

Guidelines for Interacting with Preceptors, Colleagues and Employers

1. Do not post content or otherwise speak on behalf of your practice education employer unless you are authorized to do so.
2. Maintain professional boundaries in all workplace relationships. You should not exchange private emails, text messages or photos with or about preceptors, colleagues or employers. For the duration of your practice education program you are a representative of Dalhousie University and your profession and all interactions with preceptors, colleagues and employers should be respectful and professional.
3. Do not criticize fellow health care professionals, preceptors/clinical instructors or fellow classmates – even if unnamed – in online fora. If you have concerns, these can be addressed through official university or employer channels.
4. Do not post photos or information or discuss confidential details about colleagues, employers or workplace practices online, even if unnamed or seemingly anecdotal.

Guidelines for Using Electronic Devices for Learning Purposes

1. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with your practice education employer's policy for the use of personal electronic devices for learning purposes. Some employers do not allow the use of personal electronic devices even for learning purposes such as accessing web enabled reference texts and library resources. Always ask your preceptor before using personal devices.
2. You should never collect patient/client information on a personal mobile device. Only employer-provided mobile devices should be used for the collection of patient/client information (such as updated electronic health records or conducting intake assessments, etc).