



Misuse of the Internet and Social Media and its Detrimental Consequences

Tip Sheet

Health care workers who use the workplace Internet for inappropriate purposes not only risk discipline by their employers, but it can put their professional licences at risk. This can also apply to the use of mobile devices (such as cell phones and tablets) and personal computers at home.

It is imperative that all health care workers are familiar with their employer policies on social media and Internet use. If your employer does not have one, ask for one to be developed.

Professionals in health care settings should be aware of their workplace surroundings – the optics of nurses on hand-held devices, for instance, could be misconstrued by patients, families and the general public. Be cautious of the context in which you are using a mobile device.

Internet Statistics and Social Media

The rapid growth of social networking websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and personal blogs (opinion pieces that are posted online), have opened up many channels to communicate with co-workers, friends and family.

According to Statistics Canadaⁱ, about 44 per cent of adult internet users go online while at work. In addition, about 64 per cent of adults access the Internet using a wireless handheld device each day. Daily Internet use among adults between ages 18-34 is at about 97 per cent.ⁱⁱ Younger generations are online emailing, texting and checking their social networking sites quite frequently so they should be aware of their workplace's Internet use and social media policies.

Social media is a great way to engage with other members and to follow specific topics and themes. Social media is an online, two-way communication, a venue for building and engaging online conversations and exchanging ideas and information. There are tens of thousands of social media sites and include but are not limited to: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and blogging.

Social Media Cautions

Please remember that anything you post or tweet could be seen by your employer, a coworker or a patient and their family. When you login to your social media accounts, remember that you are representing both yourself and your profession. What you post can become very public very

quickly and can be viewed, forwarded and printed virtually anywhere around the world by anyone – including by your employer. In fact, more and more employers are accessing social networking sites as a screening and recruitment tool for potential employees.

As well, many employers have the ability to determine what websites you are visiting while on the job.

There have been an increasing number of investigations and discipline, up to discharge from employment, imposed by employers related to the misuse of internet sites. This is in addition to pre-existing cases where employers, including hospitals, have performed audits resulting in discipline of professional employees who use workplace computers to access the Internet to view or distribute offensive material such as pornography, sexist, racist or other inappropriate material.

That's not all that's at stake. You can be found guilty of professional misconduct, disgraceful and/or dishonourable conduct by your professional college for inappropriate Internet use.

Colleges' Discipline Committees will not decline to discipline because an employer has already taken action and will not consider factors such as widespread abuse in certain workplaces or the condoning of Internet abuse by employers. The colleges indicate professionals also cannot use ignorance as a defense.

ONA members must exercise caution and use careful judgment when it comes to Internet use or use of social media while at work.

Tips: The Dos and Don'ts of Social Media

ONA issues the following recommendations to ensure you don't find yourself in an unwanted situation:

- Be familiar with your employer policies on social media and internet use.
- If your employer does not have a policy on social media and Internet use, ask for one to be developed.
- Do not use employer computers or employer mobile devices for confidential union business or political action.
- Do not use your work computer or employer mobile devices for your personal communications including web browsing. Most employers have policies that prohibit personal use of workplace computers.
- Never use your workplace computer to access offensive material such as pornography, sexist, racist or other inappropriate material.
- Never post information about your patients/clients/residents and/or coworkers on social networking websites or personal blogs. Privacy is crucial in health care and must never be violated.
- Remember that public criticism or slander of your workplace can be grounds for discipline up to and including discharge. Every employee has a duty of fidelity (e.g. loyalty) to her or his employer.
- Never forget that personal communications sent from any computer, including your home computer, can become public.

- Do not assume that using a nickname instead of your real name on your personal blog grants you anonymity. It doesn't.
- If in doubt, don't do it! If your Internet usage on the job doesn't have anything to do with the normal daily routine of work, steer clear.
- You cannot agree to be "friends" and/or "like" on Facebook or other social media with patients, clients, residents and/or their families, either at work or personally, because it violates the therapeutic boundaries of the nurse/patient relationship regardless of whether you try to "friend" them or they try to "friend" you.
- Refer to ONA's Position Paper on Photography, Video and Audio Taping of ONA Members Providing Care (January 25, 2012). You can access this by visiting www.ona.org under the Publications and Forms tab.
- The issue should be raised at Labour-Management Committee meetings to determine if there is an employer policy in place to deal with these issues concerning the use of social media and cyber-bullying.
- Use social media to research trends, ideas and best practices on a host of topics including health care and labour.
- Follow topics and organizations that interest you. Most organizations maintain social media sites, including ONA.
- Make sure you use appropriate privacy settings on your social media accounts.

Please note: This tip sheet is intended to provide an overview of inappropriate use of social media and Internet use at work and at home. For more specific information and guidance, please speak to your Labour Relations Officer (LRO).

ⁱ Statistics Canada. Table 358-0219 - Canadian Internet use survey, Internet use, by location and frequency of use, occasional (percent), CANSIM (database).

ⁱⁱ CRTC Policy Monitoring Report, 2012

<http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/PolicyMonitoring/2012/cmr4.htm#t455>