

9 September 2010

Information sheet on social media

Introduction

Social media is an expanding area of online communication. Social networking websites are a useful way to communicate on both a professional and personal level. Some common sites include Facebook, YouTube and MySpace.

Summary

Nurses and midwives are able to use social media not only to engage with family and friends to share feelings, opinions or photos, but also to connect with colleagues and professional associations.

The use of social media has many benefits and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) embraces this technology. However, nurses and midwives need to be aware of the potential implications of their online behaviour, and how it can affect their professional life and registration.

When posting information on a social networking site, nurses and midwives need to consider that the comments made are in the public domain and will remain there for an extended period of time.

This information sheet has been developed to provide a framework for accountable and responsible practice for the online activities of nurses and midwives.

Scope of application

These guidelines are relevant to:

- nurses and midwives registered under the National Law¹
- employers of nurses and midwives
- education providers.

Requirements

These guidelines are intended to be read in conjunction with the NMBA-adopted Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council's (ANMC) code of ethics, code of professional conduct and the guide to professional boundaries for both the nursing and midwifery professions.

1. The *Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia* (2008) and the *Code of Professional Conduct for Midwives in Australia* (2008) outline the following three conduct statements, which are essential in guiding online activities:
 - Nurses and midwives respect the dignity, culture, ethnicity, values and beliefs of people receiving care and treatment, and of their colleagues.
 - Nurses and midwives treat personal information obtained in a professional capacity as private and confidential.
 - Nurses and midwives maintain and build on the community's trust and confidence in the professions at all times.

¹ The National Law is contained in the schedule to the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009* (Qld).

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2. Nurses and midwives must consider their employer's policies and procedures relating to social media.
3. Before posting a comment or uploading information, nurses and midwives need to strongly consider if they really want that information in the public domain and whether the information is respectful, appropriate or could it be considered offensive.
4. When using a social networking site, nurses and midwives need to ensure that they have read the site's privacy policy. This will enable nurses and midwives to understand who will store their personal or professional information, and how this information will be used.
5. Nurses and midwives need to ensure they understand and have applied the appropriate privacy settings in their social network accounts. This will prevent unexpected information sharing.

Definitions

Social media is communication through the use of the internet. Social media enables users to come together to provide and share information relating to a common theme. Social media has many paths, such as blogs or forums.

Social networks are a part of social media. They are purpose-built websites that enable people to communicate. Examples include Twitter, Facebook, Bebo and Friendster.

References

Australian Government Office of the Privacy Commissioner. *Your privacy rights FAQs*.
<http://www.privacy.gov.au/faq/individuals>

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2008) *Code of Ethics for Midwives in Australia*, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Canberra. <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-and-Guidelines.aspx>

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2008) *Code of Ethics for Nurses in Australia*, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Canberra. <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-and-Guidelines.aspx>

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Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2010) *A Midwife's Guide to Professional Boundaries*, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Canberra. <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-and-Guidelines.aspx>

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (2010) *A Nurse's Guide to Professional Boundaries*, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Canberra. <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-and-Guidelines.aspx>

Review

This information sheet will commence on 9 September 2010 and will be reviewed at least every three years.

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Please note correspondence concerning individual registration must be sent to the State or Territory board currently responsible for practitioner registration.