

Facebook and the Registered Nurse

Q As a Registered Nurse what do I need to know about using Facebook?

A The SRNA Standards and Foundation Competencies for Registered Nurses (2007) states, the Registered Nurse (RN) “understands ethical and legal considerations in maintaining client confidentiality in all forms of communication:

written, oral, and electronic” [#80] (p. 10).

Facebook is a useful social networking tool that RNs need to approach cautiously. RNs must be aware that providing patient health information (PHI) that was collected through the provision of care is a breach of confidentiality when posted on sites like Facebook. Information posted to Facebook about a patient experience or care provided could lead to identification of the patient through association (for example: knowledge that you are an RN, who you work for, and what department you work in). The use of PHI on Facebook is outside the scope of the intended use and purposes for which the information was collected. In

some cases RNs may not be aware the information they provide in an update to their personal page may be shared beyond those intended recipients. The basic ‘rule of thumb’ for PHI use and disclosure is whether the receiver of the information has a ‘need to know’.

The CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses (2008) identifies RNs ethical responsibilities regarding maintaining privacy and

confidentiality as follows,

“Nurses respect the right of people to have control over the collection, use, access and disclosure of their personal information” (p. 15). Be aware of your organizational policies, procedures, and processes

including how to manage a privacy breach.

If you are aware of a breach of privacy on a social networking site like Facebook, the Code of Ethics states, “Nurses intervene if others

inappropriately access or disclose personal or health information of persons receiving care” (CNA, 2008, p. 16). This can involve discussing your concern with your co-worker, manager / supervisor, Privacy Officer, and the SRNA Competence Assurance Advisor.

This is the first article of an ongoing series regarding social networking and e-health impacting the practice of registered nursing practice. If you have additional questions contact the SRNA Practice Advisement team at 359-4200 or 1-800-667-9945.

Learn more about Privacy and Confidentiality of PHI:

- Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) www.cna-aiic.ca/cna/
- Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS): InfoLaw Bulletins www.cnps.ca
- Office of the Privacy Commissioner (Saskatchewan) www.oipc.sk.ca
- Office of the Privacy Commissioner (Federal) www.priv.gc.ca

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References

Canadian Nurses Association. (2008). Code of ethics for registered nurses. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. (2007). Standards and foundation competencies for the practice of registered nurses. Regina, SK: Author.