



Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board

Interpretation Guide

Use of Social Media

(Companion to the NLPB Code of Ethics)

Approved December 8, 2023

1) Introduction

Personal and professional use of social media continues to expand and can provide pharmacy professionals with many opportunities for information sharing. However, pharmacy professionals must be aware of, and ensure that, they are considering the best interests of their patients and the public and managing the risks associated with social media use.

In the context of this document,

“social media” includes web and mobile technologies and practices that are used to share content, experiences, insights, opinions, and perspectives online. While platforms are constantly changing, they include but are not limited to Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, “X” (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, online discussion forums, such as Quora and Reddit, as well as other blogs, podcasts, or websites.

2) Expectations

2.1 Pharmacy professionals are expected to apply the same standards of professional and ethical conduct (as outlined in the Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board (“NLPB”) Code of Ethics¹) to all interactions, regardless of whether they are personal or professional in nature or taking place in person or online through social media.

2.2 Pharmacy professionals are expected to consider the public nature of social media and understand and minimize the professional and personal risk created by participating in and having a presence on social media platforms.

- Applying stringent security and privacy settings is advisable, but this does not necessarily preclude someone from screen-capturing and sharing content in other contexts or on other platforms. Posting content anonymously, under a pseudonym, in a “private” group or chat, or from a personal account also does not necessarily protect you from the potential consequences of inappropriate activity. Assume all social media posts, whether your own or responses to another person’s post, to be in the public domain and accessible to all, regardless of privacy settings.

2.3 When determining whether something is appropriate to post or discuss on social media, consider the following statements from the NLPB Code of Ethics:

- *1.7. Registrants take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to patients.*
- *2.1. Registrants respect the professional relationship with the patient, and act with honesty, integrity, and compassion in order to foster the patient’s trust and confidence in the registrant.*
- *2.2. Registrants treat all those they serve with courtesy and respect.*
- *2.5. Registrants recognize the power imbalance in the registrant-patient relationship and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients.*
- *2.6. Registrants act in the best interests of their patients and do not exploit the registrant-patient relationship for any personal gain.*

¹ See NLPB Code of Ethics. Available at: <https://nlpb.ca/pharmacy-practice/standards-guidelines-policies/>

- 4.1. Registrants understand, respect, and comply with all relevant legislation, standards, and policies pertaining to the privacy, confidentiality, collection, and storage of personal health information.
- 4.4. Registrants protect and keep confidential all information acquired in the course of their practice.
- 4.5. Registrants use, or disclose, personal health information only for the purposes for which it was collected, except with the consent of the patient, or as required by law.
- 4.7. Registrants take reasonable steps to ensure that communications with, or about, patients take place in a way that preserves patient confidentiality.
- 4.8. Registrants avoid public discussion or comments about patients that could reasonably be seen to be revealing confidential, or identifying, information.
- 6.1. Registrants obey the laws, regulations, standards, and policies of the profession, both in letter and in spirit.
- 6.2. Registrants embrace the ethical principles of the profession, and do not engage in activity that will undermine public trust in, or bring discredit to, the profession.
- 8.1. Registrants act with honesty and integrity when interacting with colleagues and other health professionals.
- 10.2. Registrants recognize that self-regulation is a privilege, and that they have an ongoing responsibility to uphold the principles associated with this privilege, and to support the public protection mandate of the Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board.

2.4 Pharmacy professionals are expected to maintain clear and appropriate professional boundaries² with patients and consider the appropriateness of establishing personal connections with patients or people closely associated with them online.

2.5 Pharmacy professionals must be cautious if posting information online that relates to an actual patient or another health professional.

- Do not share personal health information or any other information that identifies, or could potentially identify, a patient or another health professional. This includes any information that could allow a patient or other health professional to recognize themselves.

2.6 Pharmacy professionals must be cautious when providing health information through social media.

- While using social media to disseminate generic health information for educational or information sharing purposes may be fine, refrain from using these platforms to provide professional services or clinical advice to specific patients.

2.7 In accordance with section 58. of the *Pharmacy Act, 2012*³ and the NLPB Code of Ethics, pharmacy professionals have a duty to report to NLPB if they have knowledge of professional misconduct, professional incompetence, incapacity, or unfitness to practice, conduct unbecoming, or any breach of the legislation, regulations, or Code of Ethics by another pharmacy professional.

PLEASE NOTE: While not all pharmacy owners are pharmacy professionals, pharmacy owners are also expected to abide by this guidance.

² See also NLPB Code of Ethics Interpretation Guide – Maintaining Professional Boundaries. Available at: <https://nlpb.ca/pharmacy-practice/standards-guidelines-policies/>

³ See *Pharmacy Act, 2012*. Available at: <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/p12-2.htm>