

Professional Use of Social Media

*(This Practice Advisory replaces the advisory *Guidance on the Use of Social Media* issued by the College in November 2015.)

The Practice Advisories of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario dentists in the care of their patients. It is important to note that these Practice Advisories may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained.

Social media can be an important professional tool. The College supports the responsible use of various social media.

However, dentists are bound by ethical and professional obligations that extend beyond their clinics or offices. When you are online, you must follow the same rules of professional conduct that guide you at work.

Make sure any content you upload to the internet does not hurt public confidence in the dental profession or compromise your own professionalism. Poor judgment in such actions can put you at risk for behaviour that may be viewed as unprofessional and/or dishonourable.

Standards of patient privacy and confidentiality must be maintained in all situations, including online. Do not post identifiable patient information online. Take extra care in small communities, where a very small amount of shared information on social media may identify an individual patient.

If dentists interact with patients on the internet, they must maintain the boundaries of the patient-dentist relationship outlined in RCDSO policies and in law.



Consider separating personal and professional content online. Use a dedicated professional email or web link to follow up with patients, post procedure. Information on post-surgical follow-up or finances needs to be part of the patient record. Make sure all emails or other internet communications are added to the patient's file.

It is always the dentist's responsibility to maintain professional boundaries; responsibility cannot be handed over to the patient. The College recommends that dentists very carefully consider any online "friend" or "follower" request from a patient. In many cases it may be best if you politely refuse and explain it is beyond the scope of your professional relationship. In the same way, be wary of initiating online contacts with patients.

Online "privacy" is never absolute. A dentist's professionalism should extend to their private accounts. Posting material that demonstrates, or appears to demonstrate, behaviour that might be considered unprofessional, inappropriate or unethical should always be avoided.

Do not make gratuitous, unsubstantiated or unsustainable negative comments about individuals, groups or organizations, especially any comment that might be seen as showing hatred to racialized people, people with disabilities or negative comments about socio-economic status.

Online profanity, disparaging or discriminatory remarks about individual patients or types of patients is unacceptable. Posting or retweeting images or jokes that could cause offence should always be avoided.

Dentists should routinely monitor their online presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites is accurate and appropriate. Websites are a form of professional advertisement; some social media may also be considered advertising. Read and follow the legal and professional responsibilities outlined in the College's Practice Advisory on Professional Advertising.

