



Use of social media and online networking

Social media incorporates the online and mobile device tools people use to share opinions, information, experiences, images, and video or audio clips, as well as websites and other electronic applications used for social networking. Access to social media sites, feeds and groups has become common place for most Australians.

The purpose of this guideline is to:

- Clarify the role and obligation of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing* in their use of social media and online networking in both their professional and personal lives;
- Guide nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing on the issues to be considered when using various social media and online networking platforms; and,
- Clarify the role and obligation of employers in providing safeguards around the use of social media technologies in the workplace.

Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing need to consider the following when using social media and online networking:

1. It is necessary to understand and abide by professional and legal obligations, including evidence-based practice and the policies of your workplace, relating to the use of social media.^{1, 2, 3}
2. Regulated health practitioners have professional obligations in relation to privacy/ confidentiality and consent:
 - a. When creating and transmitting images on mobile devices for professional purposes, you must obtain consent from the person in your care who is the subject of these images, capture and use of the image, storage, and ultimate destruction of the image (on the device).
 - b. The consent you obtain should be in writing and requires active engagement and communication with the person, including where and by whom the image will be used and how the image and accompanying information will be managed.
3. When posting or re-posting to social media, carefully consider: the content and intent of the post; professional and regulatory requirements; laws, for example, those relating to defamation, discrimination and racial hatred; the tone of the post (avoid discriminatory, indecent, obscene, vulgar, offensive, abusive or vilifying language, material, information and images); who the post is to and how that person or site may manage or re-transmit the post; who may have access to the site receiving a post; how the original post may be used by unrelated third parties; how posts may affect reputations; and how difficult it may be to delete or remove posts.
4. Be respectful and polite and do not refer to the people in your care, your workmates, colleagues or employer in the social media environment.
5. Use work based computers and mobile devices in accordance with workplace policies.

*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled)



6. Avoid making any references to your registration as a health practitioner, your qualifications or your employment when posting online in a personal capacity.
7. Do not post photos or information about people in your professional care on your social networking applications.
8. If using your personal device/s to take photos of people in your care (of their presenting issue, for example, wounds, rashes, fractures, foreign bodies in eyes) for the person's file and/or for transmission to another clinician, ensure you work within legislative requirements, as well as your organisation's policies, and maintain professional confidentiality and privacy standards.
9. Don't give or post any solicited or unsolicited advice or information in relation to the provision of a health service, particularly where such advice is outside your scope of practice.
10. Don't invite or accept people in your professional care as 'friends' or follow them on any social media platform. Consider whether you should 'block' their profiles in order to minimise the chance of any inappropriate communication occurring.
11. While you are entitled to a private and a personal life, the sharing nature of online social media can create issues when the personal encroaches on the professional, or where the lines between the private person and the regulated practitioner become blurred. Keep your personal life and professional life separate, but understand others may not maintain this distinction.
12. Your social networking is not private and you should be aware of the limitations of so-called private settings on your electronic devices and within the social media sites you use.⁴ Setting your social network page to 'private' or having spam and virus filters, may not provide protection for your postings or emails and attachments. In addition, these privacy settings may not prevent others you 'trust' from re-posting your pictures or words.
13. Posting information in closed groups should not be considered private. Be aware that anything you post can be shared by another person taking a screenshot of your comments.
14. Carefully consider your use of social networking before signing up. Think about which networks you are contemplating joining, why and what happens with your information, images and data.
15. Be aware that images and words placed online endure, and consider their potential impact on your current and/or future employment.
16. Understand that cookies, location services and many Apps track your habits, whereabouts and upload your personal data, information and images.
17. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing may from time to time wish to engage in workplace campaigns via social media such as enterprise bargaining campaigns (which might include taking industrial action). During these campaigns, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing may post photos of their attendance at rallies or share other ANMF social media content. ANMF members are lawfully able to participate in workplace campaigns in order to promote their



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industrial, professional and occupational health and safety interests. However, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing are encouraged to be familiar with any workplace policy relating to public comments.

18. If you are a private practitioner or work in the private practice of other regulated health practitioners, understand that use of online social media may have significant implications for advertising of your health care service. Be aware of the policies of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) on advertising and social media.⁵
19. You should be aware that members of the public such as visitors to your workplace or the person for whom you are providing care, may use social media devices to film/audio record you while undertaking aspects of care. This can easily be done without your knowledge with the aid of a listening/videoing device such as a smartphone or hidden camera. You should know that each state and territory has legislation regarding surveillance and listening devices.⁶ While the legislation varies across states and territories, its intent is to prohibit the use of recording devices without the consent of participants to a conversation. If your consent has not been obtained prior to film/audio imaging of your activities, you should report this recording to your employer.

Employer's responsibilities relating to use of social media:

1. Where employers require nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to access online resources, health care facilities should provide sufficient electronic equipment for this to occur.
2. Employers should not discuss or post work related matters on social media without the express permission of the nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing involved.
3. Employers have a duty of care to protect nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing against the misuse of social media by other health practitioners, patients, or members of the public (such as visitors to the workplace). This may include unauthorised posting of images of employees in the workplace or comments about their professional practice. Nurses and midwives must comply with the NMBA *Guidelines for advertising regulated health services*.⁷
4. Organisational policies should be developed in conjunction with nurses and midwives, outlining rights and responsibilities relating to use of social media and online networking for:
 - Employees,
 - People who are receiving care,
 - Visitors to the health or aged care facility, and
 - Members of the media.

These organisational policies should include the requirement for consent to be obtained for any audio or video imaging in the workplace specifically for use in the social media environment.

5. Employers should place clear signage throughout the facility about the rights and responsibilities of all parties in relation to the use of social media or online networking. This should include that unauthorised audio/video filming (from a mobile or fixed device) is not permitted on the premises.



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References

1. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA). Social media: How to meet your obligations under the National Law 2019. Available at <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines/Social-media-guidance.aspx>
2. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) Professional Practice Framework includes and is available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx>
 - National Decision Making Framework
 - Codes of Ethics, including:
 - ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses 2012
 - ICM Code of Ethics for Midwives 2012
 - Codes of Conduct, including:
 - Code of Conduct for Nurses 2018,
 - Code of Conduct for Midwives 2018 and
 - Registration Standards
3. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner has useful Guidelines assisting understanding of the Privacy Act. These Guidelines include information on gathering, storing and destruction of personal information and consent. *The Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* is available, along with information and guidelines, from the Office of the Australian Information Officer at: <http://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-act/the-privacy-act>
4. Australian Government 'StaySmartOnline': <https://www.staysmartonline.gov.au/socialising>
5. Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Information on advertising legislation and guidelines for regulated health practitioners. Available at: <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Publications/Advertising-resources/Legislation-guidelines.aspx>
6. Arts Law Centre of Australia. Information Sheet: Filming with a smartphone or hidden camera. Available at: <http://www.artslaw.com.au/info-sheets/>
7. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA). Guidelines for advertising regulated health services. Available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines/Guidelines-for-advertising-regulated-health-services.aspx>

To be read in conjunction with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Advertising by Nurses and Midwives Information Sheet; the ANMF Digital Health Policy and the ANMF Privacy Policy.