



CONDUCT COUNTS!

Social Media

SCENARIO

Andrew was a newly Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) with the CRTO and couldn't wait to begin his career at a brand new Facility. Andrew couldn't wait to put his training and skillsets to use for patient's that came through the doors. After a few months of working at the Facility and getting into the swing of things, Andrew felt extremely competent and successful, always delivering the best possible patient care and often having colleagues come to him for advice and practise recommendations. One night, a patient presented themselves at the Facility with life-threatening injuries, something no one had ever seen before. Andrew decided to take photos of the patient and post it on a private Facebook group which contained other Respiratory Therapists Andrew knew personally. Andrew thought that one of the other RTs could help on how to treat the patient's condition. However, one of people in the Facebook group shared the post, which in turn was then shared many more times. Andrew's private post had now become public!

A colleague had seen the post circulating on social media and reported the information to the ICU manager. As a result of the incident, Andrew was issued a 14 day suspension from the Facility.

Andrew thought he could share this photo as the social media accounts were private. However, Andrews post became wildly shared on the internet, compromising patient safety and Andrew's obligation of patient confidentiality.

RESULTS

The CRTO received a report from the Facility which included screenshots of Andrew's post, the Facility's policies on patient confidentiality, and the Facility's policy on code of conduct. Based on the information in the Report, the Inquires, Complaints and Reports Committee (ICRC) of the CRTO launched an investigation into the Member's conduct. At the conclusion of the investigation, it was determined that Andrews conduct and actions contravened the CRTO's Standards of Practice.

As a result, the ICRC ordered Andrew to complete a specified continuing education and remediation program (SCERP) on social media posting by healthcare professionals, complete a SCERP related to ethics and professionalism, and attend before the ICRC for an oral caution.

EXPECTATION

The ICRC felt that Andrew's conduct contravened the Standards of Practice, including:

Standard 11: Privacy / Confidentiality

- b. Share patient/client information with other **healthcare team** members only when necessary for the provision of care and quality improvement activities, seeking patient/client consent when required.



PROFESSIONALISM

"Professionalism" or professional conduct is a term often used to describe the behaviours that are expected of individuals who hold a certain role in society. A "professional" is typically someone who has obtained skills that are recognized as requiring specific, intensive training and who applies those skills in a position impacting others (e.g., engineer, lawyer, RT, PT, MD, etc.). Professionals are often held to moral, ethical and legal standards because of this potential impact.



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EXPECTATION (continued)

- c. Take precautions to ensure that conversations and sharing of information via other mediums (e.g., social media, audiovisual recordings) regarding patients/clients are not accessible to others and that patient/client information is not shared with those who are not directly involved in their care.

Standard 12: Professional Boundaries / Therapeutic & Professional Relationships

- g. Communicate electronically and through social media in a manner that respects therapeutic and professional relationships.

Standard 13: Professional Responsibilities

Responsibilities to the CRTO

- b. Assume responsibility and accountability for their own actions and decisions
- g. Must not contravene, or fail to maintain, a standard of practice of the profession or a published standard of the CRTO.

Responsibilities to the Profession and the Public

- a. Comply with all current provincial and federal legislation for the protection of patients/clients, **healthcare team** members, the general public, and the environment
- m. Behave in a professional manner that presents a positive image of Respiratory Therapy to the community.

The ICRC's opinion was that although Andrew may not have intended to harm the Patient, they failed to act in accordance of their professional obligations and expectations. Patient safety and confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Sharing your thoughts, opinions or situations from the workplace on social media platforms has the potential to become public and widely shared, despite your best intentions and attempts to keep it private.

In Andrew's situation, this jeopardized patient safety and the integrity of the profession, which members of the public expect regulated healthcare professionals to uphold on an on-going basis. Members of the public expect regulated healthcare professionals to act in accordance with their Facility and CRTO expectations, and therefore this significantly impacted the Public's trust of Andrew and Respiratory Therapists.

The Panel noted that it is important that healthcare professionals collaborate in order to provide the best patient care possible, and that this is to be done within the healthcare setting where confidentiality can be strictly maintained.

BOTTOM LINE

Pause before you post. While you may think that your social media accounts are private and that the content you post is private, there is always a possibility of your post or comments being shared or saved (via a screenshot) and distributed to others.

RESOURCES

[eLearning Module on Social Media: Pause Before You Post](#)

[Abuse Awareness & Prevention Professional Practice Guideline](#)

[CRTO Standards of Practice](#)