

Use of Social Media by Respiratory Therapists **Fact Sheet**

Overview

The CRTO recognizes the positive impact that social media can have on the healthcare community, including facilitating communication, collaboration, and knowledge distribution. It is important to remember however, that there are potential consequences if the content is interpreted by others as improper or the use of these platforms is unprofessional.

Many facilities and companies have policies regarding social media use which often reflect their specific organizational expectations and values. As an individual who is associated with these organizations, it is important to follow these guidelines when conducting themselves in a recorded format.

Respiratory Therapists have a professional and moral obligation to conduct and represent themselves in a manner which maintains and enhances the reputation and perception of the profession to the public, such that trust, and confidence is built and maintained. The CRTO would like to remind RT's that they must comply with the expectations of the profession, including legislative, and use their professional judgement to ensure that their social media posts align with the CRTO's Standards of Practice and Commitment to Ethical Practice document.

Considerations

Prior to posting, please consider these values:

- **Accountability and integrity:** Your posts may be interpreted as a direct reflection of yourself, your organization, and your profession, and could be potentially damaging to reputations. Your professional and personal lives are intertwined. Reflect on your own intentions and the possible consequences.
- **Professionalism:** As a regulated healthcare professional, your posted content may be received as medical or professional advice. Weigh the risks and benefits of the information you share. You are required to always uphold and maintain a professional image on your social media accounts. Failure to do so could be considered Professional Misconduct. [About the Standards - CRTO Standards of Practice](#)
- **Privacy and confidentiality:** Breaches are often unintentional and inadvertent. Photos and content may hold identifying details that can reveal confidential information surrounding a patient, their family, or the organization. This can have severe consequences to not only yourself, but to the organization under privacy legislation. Confidentiality: [Standard 11 | CRTO Standards of Practice](#)



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- **Patient/client boundaries:** Remember to maintain professional boundaries. As best practice do not extend or accept friend requests from anyone with whom you have a therapeutic relationship or their family. Respect existing power imbalances, including those in the workplace.
- **Communicate respectfully and thoughtfully:** Social media platforms are informal and subjected to heated discussions. As a professional, you must always choose your words carefully. When in doubt, act like the entire world can and will read what you just posted. Remember, it is a permanent record.

Resources

For more information on how social media impacts RT Practice, please refer to the following documents:

CRTO Standards of Practice:

- **Standard 3.6:** Refrain from making false, deliberately misleading or offensive statements, contrary to the interests of the public or the honour and dignity of the profession, whether orally or in writing;
- **Standard 8.6:** Refrain from making a representation about a remedy, treatment, device or procedure for which there is no generally accepted scientific or empirical basis;
- **Standard 12.7:** Communicate electronically and through social media in a manner that respects therapeutic and professional relationships; and
- **Standard 13.26:** Behave in a professional manner that presents a positive image of Respiratory Therapy to the community.

For Ontario privacy legislation:

- **PIHPA:** <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/04p03>

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Q & As

Respiratory Therapists hold a position of trust and respect with the public, especially within the current context of a global respiratory pandemic. As such, RT's must not make comments or provide advice that encourage the public to act contrary to public health orders and recommendations.

Question: An RT takes a picture of themselves dressed in a full personal protective suit outside of a patient's room in the ICU and posts on their social media page with the #COVID. Is this a concern?

Answer: Regardless of an employer's policy, this behavior is unprofessional. Furthermore, may go against their organizational policy with respect to the use of social media while at work. There is also the potential that based on the details of the photo, the location and specific patient room is potentially identifiable. Tagging it with "COVID" not only reveals a specific diagnosis with respect to a facility, but also possibly to the patient. Hash tagging it will distribute that picture far past the "privacy" of the RT's personal social media.

Question: In a heated moment, an RT had posted an angry rant about the working conditions at their facility, including how short staffed they always were and how patient care was affected. The next day, they reflected on this and decided to remove the post from their account. Can they still face repercussions?

Answer: A healthcare worker must always maintain a professional image on their social media page and refrain from making false, misleading, or offensive comments that are contrary to public interest. Use respectful communication and conflict resolution approaches to discuss, report and resolve workplace issues IN your workplace, NOT online. Furthermore, anything that exists on a server is there forever and can be retrieved and discoverable in a court of law. Your personal status updates and photos, even if marked private, can be shared, and distributed to a wider public by someone in your network.



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Question: An RT is found to have shared unconventional and unsubstantiated treatment advice for a serious respiratory disease, which discussed herbal remedies as a “potential cure”. If this is their personal opinion, and this is posted on their personal social media page, is there a concern?

Answer: While each person is entitled to their own philosophies and beliefs, as a regulated healthcare professional, there is a moral and professional obligation to be sensitive and cognizant of your audience. As an RT, you are always held to a higher personal and professional standard and the information you post, may be held by others, to be valid and correct. Avoid discussing health-related topics that could be viewed as dispensing treatment advice. If the information you post is viewed as contrary, rather than in line with, Public Health guidelines, you are in violation of the CRTC standards ([Standard 8 – Evidence Informed Practice](#)).

Question: During the pandemic lockdown, a healthcare worker posts a picture of themselves out at a large public event, with a group of friends. As a direct violation of a government order, what message is this sending to the public?

Answer: The message this post sends to the public is contrary to public health orders and recommendations, which as a health professional, is your obligation to promote and support. Everything you post directly links back to your profession and can damage reputations. As a regulated healthcare professional, it is your obligation to behave in a manner which presents a positive image of Respiratory Therapy to the community.

Question: An RN “liked” a friend’s post regarding anti-vaccines during the pandemic. Is there a concern with this behaviour?

Answer: It is important to remember that “liking”, “commenting” or “sharing” of someone else’s inappropriate or disrespectful post, is similar in nature to posting it yourself. The message can be interpreted that these are also your beliefs and opinions.

