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| <b>Policy Name</b>                               | <b>Participating in Social Media Policy</b> | <b>Number</b>                | P 14 |
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**Preamble**

The proliferation of social media and online networking forums raises ethical and professional considerations for midwives. While the subject of professional boundaries is not new, applying parameters of professional distance and respect in the era of digital connectivity is an emerging concept with its own unique challenges, particularly in the face of rapidly changing online technologies.

Social media and online networking technologies should be treated as virtual public spaces, used by millions and potentially accessible by all. These sites allow people to connect, interact and share information over the internet through portals such as social networking sites, media-sharing sites, blogs, online forums, wikis, text messaging and multi-media messaging.

**Participating in Social Media**

Midwives are responsible for ensuring that their practice follows provincial and federal privacy laws.

Midwives shall at all times protect and maintain the confidentiality of client personal information consistent with CMA Code of Ethics, the *Alberta Health Information Act* (HIA) and the *Alberta Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) and shall not engage in any professional activity that would adversely affect the honour, dignity, or credibility of the profession.

Midwives have the professional and ethical responsibility to ensure that both they and their staff exercise care in the collection, use and disclosure of clients' personal information, regardless of format. They must also consider the professional, legal and ethical risks and liabilities of using the rapidly evolving social media and online networking technologies that allow individuals to connect, interact and share information over the internet through social networking sites. Midwives should be aware that all means of electronic communication/ information can be retrieved and can be used in a court of law<sup>1</sup> even when it has long been deleted.

When participating in social media sites or online networking forums and blogs, midwives must protect against any possibility that their clients' personal information could be revealed and consider any situation where their professional integrity and reputation could be undermined.

<sup>1</sup> <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-5/fulltext.html>

## **Participating in Social Media**

1. Read, understand, and use the strictest privacy settings to maintain control over access to personal information.
2. Treat social networking sites as virtual public spaces, accessible by the public. Avoid any discussion or comment with or about clients or care-related events. Even without identifiers, descriptions of real case examples could compromise client privacy and confidentiality and could reasonably be seen as breaching client confidentiality.
3. Obtain a client's written permission prior to posting any personal information about them online.
4. Obtain a client's written permission prior to taking photographs which are intended for posting online.
5. Maintain professional boundaries to protect the client-midwife relationship. Avoid entering into dual relationships with clients. For example, midwives should not initiate or accept an invitation to become personal online friends with clients or clients' family members at any time during the period when a client is under her care or, if a midwife is already online friends with a client or clients' family member, she should not discuss their care online.
6. Avoid the perception of establishing an online therapeutic relationship through the posting of midwifery advice directed to an individual within a public discussion on the internet.
7. Exercise professional restraint in accessing client information through social media. Carefully manage client information acquired from legitimate health care related online sites or other sources.
8. Consider whether any postings on the internet could violate defamation, copyright or plagiarism laws.
9. Develop a clear, written protocol on the use of social media for each midwifery practice, and ensure all midwives and office staff is aware of the protocol.

## **Bibliography**

Alberta Health Information Act  
<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/H05.pdf>

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia. *Professional Standards and Guidelines – Social Media and Online Networking Forums*. 03/09/2012  
<https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/pdf/PSG-Social-Media-and-Online-Networking-Forums.pdf>

College of Midwives of British Columbia Guidelines for Participating in Social Media

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act of Canada <http://lawslois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/p-8.6/page-1.html#docCont>

College of Midwives of Alberta Code of Ethics

Alberta Personal Information Protection Act  
[http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=P06P5.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779762507](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=P06P5.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779762507)

College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta Social Media Guidelines  
[http://www.nurses.ab.ca/content/dam/carna/pdfs/DocumentList/Guidelines/Social\\_Media\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.nurses.ab.ca/content/dam/carna/pdfs/DocumentList/Guidelines/Social_Media_Guidelines.pdf)

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