


Professional Conduct and Social Networking:
Same Rules, New Game


College of Dietitians of Alberta
2010 Workshop



Case – Denise, RD

At the end of her day Denise goes on to Facebook to see what's new with her more than 100 friends. One of Denise's friends, a former patient named Jan, asks how her day is going. Feeling a bit frustrated, Denise vents, telling her about the "lazy patient she has been dealing with".

"I have this idiot patient who refuses to take my advice", Denise writes. "It's no wonder she is obese and has the medical problems she does. If she isn't going to take responsibility for her actions then she probably *should* die and it will be her own fault. She claims her problems started when she was young in Didsbury and she's always blaming her mother Shirley..."




Case – Denise, RD

Denise goes on to write, "and the nurse on my team is so gullible, she buys into the moaning and complaining. She's an idiot too – she should be fired."


Jan can tell from Denise's remarks which patient she is talking about. She has family friends in Didsbury and knows that Shirley's daughter has been seeing a Dietitian for weight and lifestyle management related to several chronic diseases. From past posts, she is also well aware of who the "nurse" is that Denise is referring to.

Another "friend" of Denise's, a fellow RD, later reads Denise's comments and feels uncomfortable with what she is reading.



Overview

- What is Social Networking?
- How does Social Networking relate to
 - Professional Conduct
 - Confidentiality and Privacy
 - Professional Boundaries
- What does this mean for you as a Dietitian?




"The times, they are a changin'"

Bob Dylan


"We must all obey the great law of change. It is the most powerful law of nature."

Edmund Burke




Social Networking

Social networking is the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals



From
TechTarget 2008



Professional vs Unprofessional Conduct

- Profession = what a professional does
- Professionalism = how they do it
 - Competence, conduct, image



Unprofessional Conduct is...

- Displaying a lack of knowledge, skill or judgment
- Contravening the *HPA*, the *Code of Ethics* or the *Standards of Practice*
- Conducting oneself in a way that harms the integrity of the regulated profession

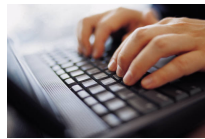
From the *Health Professions Act*

(HPA)



Social Networking and Professional Conduct

- LinkedIn
- Facebook, My Space
- Twitter
- Blogs



The issues:

- From the *Code of Ethics* of the College:
 - 1.2 Trust in the Profession
 - 2.3 Confidentiality
 - 2.4 Professional Boundaries



Code of Ethics

1.0 The dietitian protects the public as their primary professional obligation

1.2 Trust in the Profession

- (1) The dietitian maintains a level of personal and professional conduct that maintains the integrity and dignity of the profession and sustains the public's confidence in the profession.



Denise, RD

- Is Denise conducting herself in a professional manner?
- How is she representing herself and/or the profession?




Code of Ethics

1.2 Trust in the Profession

(3) The dietitian maintains public trust in the dietetic profession by bringing forward concerns about incompetent, unethical or unsafe practice by dietitians to the College.

“Another “friend” of Denise’s, a fellow RD, later reads Denise’s comments and feels uncomfortable with what she is reading.”


1.4 Duty to report



Confidentiality

Sharing others’ information may constitute unprofessional conduct

“It’s no wonder she is obese and has the medical problems she does...She claims her problems started when she was young in Didbsury and she’s always blaming her mother Shirley...”




Code of Ethics

2.3 Confidentiality

(1) The dietitian respects confidentiality of information obtained in providing professional services.

(2) The dietitian discloses confidential information only when the client consents to disclosure, when disclosure is required or permitted by law or when disclosure is necessary to protect the client or another individual from harm.


(3) the dietitian avoids indiscreet or public conversations about the client or their treatment



Confidentiality


- *Naylor Publications Co v. Media Union Manitoba*
- *Re Government of Alberta and Alberta Union of Provincial Employees*

From: Field Law. 2010. *Workwise: Current Employment and Labour Law Issues*, Issue 40.



Boundary Crossings

- Occur when the behavior of an RD deviates from the established boundaries of a professional – client relationship.
- Boundary crossings are much like a conflict of interest. However, in the case of a boundary crossing, the competing interest involves personal feelings rather than financial considerations or gifts.




Code of Ethics

2.4 Professional Boundaries

(1) The dietitian must respect boundaries that separate their personal and professional relationships and roles.

“...a former patient named Jan, asks how her day is going.”



Code of Ethics

2.4 Professional Boundaries

(2) The dietitian is sensitive to their position of relative power or influence in professional relationships and does not use their position to take physical, emotional, sexual or financial advantage of clients;



What about this?

2.4 Professional Boundaries

(1) The dietitian must respect boundaries that separate their personal and professional relationships and roles.

“Another ‘friend’ of Denise’s, a fellow RD, later reads Denise’s comments and feels uncomfortable with what she is reading.”



Boundary Crossings

“When you have to make a choice and don’t make it, that is in itself a choice.” William James



Boundary Crossings

- **Self-disclosure**
- **Developing a social relationship with clients, their family members or partners, or students**
- **Dual relationships**
- Developing a social relationship with a former client
- Accepting or giving gifts



What happens if I don’t take this to heart?

An Alberta example...



CARNA Member

“A Hearing Tribunal made a finding of unprofessional conduct against member #79,285, who identified herself on Facebook as an RN working an emergency department and posted a three-page document on Facebook in which she repeatedly and in the most derogatory, profane terms referred to patients and visitors in emergency, suggesting they are “stupid,” “retarded” and worse. In addition, she outlined in some detail exactly what she thought of these patients and visitors in an extremely derogatory, profane and hostile manner and how she would retaliate against them by losing their chart, making them wait longer, substituting saline for morphine, and expressed many hostile sentiments including that she wished they “would die faster and quieter.”



Continued...

"One of the individuals who had reported this posting to the college was a member of the public who had seen it on Facebook and was horrified.

The Tribunal ordered a reprimand; a 21 day suspension; a \$5,000 fine; a paper "Appropriate Stress Management for the Registered Nurse – What That Means for Me;" and evaluations from all employers. Conditions shall appear on the member's practice permit. Failure to comply with this order may result in suspension of CARNA practice permit."

From Alberta RN, September/October 2010



What can happen if a complaint goes to hearing tribunal?

- If found guilty, sanctions may include
 - Reprimand
 - Fine and/or additional costs of hearing
 - Course / paper on a specific topic
 - Work under supervision
 - Conditions on practice permit
 - Suspension
 - Cancellation of practice permit



What can I do?

- Be a reflective practitioner
- Manage your reputation!
- Be responsible for your online persona
- Take it offline whenever possible



What else can I do?

- Be careful what you say. Assume that anything you say could be seen by patients, clients, other professionals, interns etc. NEVER post patient specific information.
- Do not post inappropriate pictures, video or statements
- Always keep in mind your professional identity: what you say or post anywhere online could be tied to you as a professional and to your profession.
- Consider your use of foul language.
- Do not put anything on your profile that you would not display publicly at work.
- Do not solicit friendships with clients, their family members or students.
- Review and manage your privacy settings.



Re-cap

- You are a regulated health professional 24/7
- Review the *Code of Ethics*
- Review *Professional Practice Handbook*
- Be mindful of confidentiality and professional boundaries
- Reputation Management



Time for Questions



Wrap Up

- Archived for one year
- Can use towards your continuing competence plans this year
- Please email your questions or comments to mackenziesl@shaw.ca



Thank you for your participation!
