

Chapter 14

Social Media, Virtual and Cross Border Practice

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- **Social Media and Social Networking: Working Definitions**
- **Social Media: Uses in Practice**
- **Principles for Professional Social Media Conduct**
 - **Trust in the Profession and Professionalism**
 - **The Duty to Report**
 - **Confidentiality**
 - **Professional Boundaries**
 - **Communication**
- **Virtual Practice**
 - **Benefits and Limitations of Virtual Practice**
 - **Law and Regulation**
- **Cross Border Dietetic Practice**
 - **Lawful Practice and Legal Jurisdiction**
 - **Law, Regulation and Practice Statements**
 - **Additional considerations for Client-Centred Cross Border Practice**
- **Summary: How to Safely Practice Using Virtual or Social Media**
 - **Guidelines to Safeguard Against Unprofessional Conduct**
 - **8 Tips for Effective Social Media Communication**
- **Chapter Summary**
- **Case Scenarios**
- **Chapter Quiz**
- **References**

Social Media and Social Networking: Working Definitions

Social media includes the websites and applications enabling users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. *Social networking* is the use of these dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find with people with similar interests to one's own (1). The use of social media including networking forums and other digital communication methods (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, email, blogs, etc.) have become increasingly common and sought-after tools to facilitate relationship building, networking, collaborating, communicating, and sharing and gathering of information.

Social media technologies have grown from a way to connect with friends and family into a vital tool for helping businesses and professionals thrive. As the use and functionality of social media technologies in particular continues to evolve, they offer the opportunity to influence Dietetic practice and therefore the health and safety of the population. Combining these technologies with professional practice can improve the quality and timeliness of client care, improve access to accurate nutrition messages or expertise, and can improve the quality of nutrition information made available to clients and the public. The challenge with use of online social media can occur when the lines between professional and the personal, the private and the public, become blurred.

Social Media: Uses in Practice

Social media is being used for a variety of personal purposes and is becoming increasingly more common for use by health professionals in their practices. Clients and the general public use social media to access health information and to locate professionals who can assist them in improving their health. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists and other regulated health professionals are using this media to share timely and accurate, evidence-based information with the general public and/or specific clients, to raise awareness on particular topics, to promote their practice and/or expertise, to collaborate with other health professionals, for recruitment purposes, and to organize events, among many other potential uses. The types of social media and their relative uses are constantly evolving as a result of ongoing technological developments; the following is a non-exhaustive list of examples of social and digital media that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists may use in their practices:

- Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn)
- Blogs
- Microblogging (e.g. Twitter)
- Image Sharing (e.g. Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest)
- Video Sharing (e.g. YouTube)
- Email
- Tele- Video- or Virtual-Conferencing (e.g. Zoom, GoToMeeting, Teams, Cisco, WebEx, Skype, FaceTime, etc.)

These technologies allow Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to communicate one on one or with groups of individuals, for consultation, teaching and/or coaching purposes, reducing the need for travel. These tools open the door to cross-border client care, offering cost effective alternatives to face-to-face interactions (see Cross Border Dietetic Practice below).

Principles for Professional Social Media Conduct

An emerging cause of unprofessional conduct across regulatory Colleges relates to the use of social media and/or use of online communication tools. In the age of digital media, online networking, social media forums and the use of other digital communication methods (as described above) have become common tools among the general public and health professionals alike. The downside to combining these technologies with professional practice and/or personal interactions is that the line between the professional and the personal can become blurred without careful attention.

Professional practice issues arising as a result of communication via social media in particular include but are not limited to: professionalism / professional image and integrity; trust in the profession; the duty to report; breach of confidentiality; protection of privacy; boundary crossings, among other ethical issues.

To minimize the inherent risks involved when the professional uses social media for personal and/or professional communication, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are encouraged to adhere to the principles outlined in the *Standards of Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* of the College. As such, the following best practice is recommended, related to each of the following areas:

- Trust in the Profession and Professionalism
- The Duty to Report
- Confidentiality
- Professional Boundaries
- Communication

Trust in the Profession and Professionalism

Professional practice obligations and integrity for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are stated in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 12. Professional Practice Obligations: Registered Dietitians protect the public by providing professional services in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Professional obligations are also reflected in the *Code of Ethics* of the College, Section 1.0: The dietitian protects the public as their primary professional obligation.

What a professional can do to minimize risk in this area:

- The dietitian’s primary obligation is to protect the public while practicing with professional integrity; therefore, it is essential that the Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist be mindful and self-aware whenever using social or any digital media. Conduct that results in harm to a member of the public or the integrity of the profession may be deemed unprofessional conduct by the College.
- The dietitian needs to consider what they want to accomplish with their social media accounts as well as who/where their target audience is and what they value. The dietitian should consider how they want to be perceived, as social media and website content is often one of the first points of contact potential clients and patients will have with them.
- The dietitian must maintain separate personal and professional email and social media accounts and profiles, keeping in mind the principle that they are a professional “24/7”, even in personal communications.
- The dietitian must not use professional titles and initials or make references to being a regulated member of the profession or College when representing personal views, particularly when unrelated to the profession, or views that would affect the public’s trust in the profession. Once identified as a regulated member of the profession, their online comments are interpreted in that light.
- Likewise, the dietitian must not post things about their personal, private life on professional accounts and profiles, and must not follow, “friend” or communicate with patients and clients via personal accounts/profiles.
- When the professional does choose to identify themselves as a dietitian, the dietitian should consider using a disclaimer when making personal posts, such as “The posts on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the position, opinions and behaviour of Dietitians or the profession in general” (2).
- The dietitian must be mindful of their opinions shared on both personal and professional accounts and profiles. Their audience is everywhere. The more controversial their content the more likely they are to reach an unintended audience. For this reason, the dietitian must stay within their own unique scope of practice and knowledge base (3).
- The dietitian must not post disparaging, demeaning or embarrassing information about any member of the public, clients, colleagues, supervisors, employers, educators, professors, mentors, students or a regulatory body (2).
- The dietitian must maintain a professional tone and address patients formally.
- The dietitian has the duty to report unprofessional digital or social media conduct of another regulated health professional to the appropriate regulatory body.
- The dietitian must be aware of all employer policies on social media use.
- The dietitian must be aware of and take responsibility for their online persona. To the best of their ability, the dietitian must remove or edit content that may be viewed by clients, professionals or the public as unprofessional.

For more information on professionalism, unprofessional conduct, the risks and processes resulting from a complaint of unprofessional conduct, please refer to Chapter 6 on Professional Conduct.

The Duty to Report

Professional obligations related to the duty to report are also captured in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 12. Professional Practice Obligations, indicator:

“d) Comply with duty to report requirements in accordance with applicable legislation, regulations, and/or organization/employer policies.”

Related professional obligations are also reflected in the *Code of Ethics* of the College, Section 1.0: The dietitian protects the public as their primary professional obligation.

What a professional can do to minimize risk in this area:

- The dietitian can minimize risk to themselves by complying with Standard 12. Privacy/Confidentiality
- It is the dietitian’s duty to report any type of unprofessional conduct by another regulated health professional including conduct via social media or digital formats, to the appropriate regulatory body.
- It is also the dietitian’s duty to report any privacy breaches involving disclosure of health information by another regulated health professional

For more information on duty to report, please also refer to Chapter 8 on Confidentiality.

Confidentiality

In the case of *Naylor Publications Co. (Canada) v. Media Union of Manitoba, Local 191*, Arbitrator Naylor summarized the “reality of email and the internet is that privacy can never be guaranteed...the technology creates real limitations on the privacy and security of an email message.”⁹³

Confidentiality for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists is stated in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 11. Privacy/Confidentiality: Registered Dietitians uphold and protect clients’ rights to privacy and confidentiality of information collected during the provision of professional services by complying with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Confidentiality is also reflected in the *Code of Ethics* of the College, Section 2.0: The dietitian respects the autonomy and rights of the individual.

Interactions with patients/clients in a social media setting are public and may result in inadvertent disclosure of personally identifying information. This is considered a privacy breach under the *Health Information Act*. Privacy breaches involving health information have a mandatory reporting requirement and substantial personal fines. For this reason, dietitians

⁹³ Workwise: Current Employment and Labour Law Issues, Field Law, Issue #40, Summer 2010

must not accept friend requests from patients/clients to their personal social media accounts (3).

Professionals have an obligation to treat information confidentially. Sharing clients', colleagues', employers', students', or others' personally identifying information and/or using undermining or disparaging language via social media is a contravention of confidentiality and may constitute unprofessional conduct, as defined in the *Health Professions Act*.

The rules for use and disclosure of information are outlined in legislation (see Chapter 8 for details on information legislation including *PIPA*, *FOIP* and *HLA*). Sharing of a person's information either verbally or in writing, including on social networking or other online sites may constitute unprofessional conduct. Because professionals are held to a high degree of accountability to the public, such practices may lead to a complaint to the College, where the implications to the professional can be considerable (including but not limited to reprimands, fines, suspension, or revocation of practice permit with the College).

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are urged to use caution when using blogs, digital media, social networking, or any form of digital communication where either inadvertent or purposeful communication of confidential, personally identifying information of a client may be possible.

What a professional can do to minimize risk in this area:

- The dietitian must respect and protect an individual's right to privacy and respect the confidentiality of information obtained in providing professional services. Sharing others' information may constitute unprofessional conduct. The dietitian must avoid indiscreet or public online conversations about the client or their treatment.
- The dietitian must not reveal personally identifying information of any client, including using a pseudonym or initials. Even a few basic facts may be enough to identify a client to a family member or friend.
- The dietitian should familiarize themselves with privacy settings, remembering that settings can change and are not a replacement for responsible, discreet communication practices. Although privacy settings can help dietitians manage what is viewed and by whom, the information may be available to others through a variety of means. Content intended for a limited audience may be disseminated beyond the dietitian's control.
- The dietitian must assume all online content is public and accessible to anyone at any time.

For more information on protection, use and disclosure of information and confidentiality, please refer to Chapter 8 on Confidentiality.

Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are stated in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 2. Boundaries: Registered Dietitians maintain clear and appropriate professional boundaries with clients and team members.

Professional Boundaries are also reflected in the *Code of Ethics* of the College, Section 2.0: The dietitian respects the autonomy and rights of the individual.

Because professional – client (or professional – student relationships) are fiduciary, or trust, relationships where clients and students are generally in a more vulnerable position than the professional, a high degree of care is required on the part of the professional. All professionals are required to act in the best interests of their clients and students and to avoid promoting their own interests. Because of power differential between the professional and client, it is difficult to maintain professional boundaries or to prevent a boundary crossing, when dual relationships occur. Dual relationships should be avoided.

Regarding cases where professionals communicate on personal blogs or social networking sites using undermining or disparaging language against an employer, in Government of Alberta and Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Arbitrator Ponak “held that despite the right (sic) to blog and to have opinions, there are nevertheless consequences to the employment relationship when such thoughts are publicly aired and will have consequences if they irreparably harm the employment relationship.”⁹⁴

What a professional can do to minimize risk in this area:

- The dietitian must not initiate or accept requests for online contact with clients, former clients, clients’ family members nor students, unless it is for the purpose of direct client care, in which case a professional account or profile must be used. The dietitian must always be mindful of and be responsible for maintaining the professional – client relationship and professional boundaries.
- The dietitian should not share the details of their personal life on social media sites; clients, colleagues, employers, and students may access this information, putting the dietitian in a potentially difficult situation.

For more information on professional boundaries, please refer to Chapter 12 on Professional Boundaries.

Communication

Although some Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists may be reluctant to utilize social media, it is becoming increasingly true that the definition of successful communication skills includes the ability to navigate and utilize virtual spaces. Registered Dietitians should

⁹⁴ FieldLaw, Issue #40, Summer 2010

consider the benefits of learning how to use social media safely so as to avoid pitfalls resulting from lack of experience and/or knowledge of its safe use.

Communication standards for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are stated in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 5. Communication: Registered Dietitians communicate effectively, respectfully, and in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements when providing professional services.

What a professional can do to minimize risk in this area:

- Choose the best media for the best interaction/communication with the client, so as to ensure that any barriers to optimal communication are addressed (for example: phone, Zoom, Skype, Facebook, etc.)
- Always use a professional tone
- Maintain appropriate professional-client boundaries
- Maintain separate personal and professional accounts and profiles; use only professional accounts and profiles for communication with clients
- Write clearly, concisely, and professionally at all times, whether via personal or professional online spaces
- Ensure the privacy and security of information collected and documented.

For more information on communication, please refer to Chapter 13 Communication and Team Work.

Virtual Practice

Virtual dietetic practice is defined as the provision of professional service (e.g. counseling, providing information and advice, monitoring, etc.) which involves any type of intervention with a client who is remotely located from the dietitian providing the service (4). It can include telephone, videoconferencing, email, apps, web-based communication, and wearable technology. Virtual dietetic practice can occur within a jurisdiction and across borders within Canada (see the section below for information on *cross border practice*).

Providing dietetic services through virtual means establish a professional-client relationship in the same way that any in-person service would establish a professional-client relationship. The dietitian has the duty to provide care to clients in a manner consistent with care provided in person. The same professional obligations that exist in face-to-face professional interactions also exist for virtual interactions.

Any dietitian who uses virtual platforms to provide professional services must be competent to utilize them effectively and safely, including using reliable equipment, devices, and information systems. Dietitians should have contingency plans in place in case of a power outage, or connectivity or software issues.

Benefits and Limitations of Virtual Practice (4)

Benefits:

- Services can be provided in a timely manner
- Services may be delivered at a lower cost to the client
- Enhanced access to services (not limited by geographic location; clients may have greater choice of available / expert practitioners)
- More efficient use of time for dietitian (e.g. less time to travel).

Limitations:

- Potential for limited availability of or access to assessment information (e.g. health record)
- Potential for breach of confidentiality/privacy
- Potential for communication breakdown or failure
- Potential for unauthorized practice (e.g. cross border practice)
- Potential for providers to practice outside of their individual scope of practice (e.g. influencers)
- Potential for virtual practice to be favored for cost savings when direct contact may be more appropriate.
- Limited ability of regulators to effectively enforce professional standards and obligations due to difficulty of a regulatory body conducting investigations in other jurisdictions.

Law and Regulation

Professionals who engage in virtual practice should, in addition to complying with the laws and regulations governing information communication technology, use and comply with the laws/regulations governing their professional practice. Dietitians must comply with the same Standards, guidelines, and ethical practices as those governing face-to-face services. Refer to the *Standards of Practice* to review all relevant standards.

Professional Liability Insurance

Dietitians are required to carry professional liability insurance. Dietitians are responsible to ensure that their coverage includes virtual practice.

Client-Centred Virtual Dietetic Practice

Dietitians are required to act in the client's best interest at all times and to follow the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 3. Client-Centred Services: Registered Dietitians provide professional services that recognize and respect the unique needs, goals, values, and circumstances of clients.

In the context of virtual practice, dietitians must constantly evaluate the appropriateness of providing virtual dietetic services. As when providing face to face services, dietitians providing virtual services must obtain ongoing consent to dietetic and to virtual services (the client can withdraw consent at any time), and need to be aware of and maintain professional-client boundaries at all times.

Consent

Even (or especially) in virtual spaces, it is important for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to obtain consent to provide professional services. Because of the nature of social and digital media, dietitians must ensure that clients understand not only the services to be provided, but also the risks to client privacy and confidentiality of information collected. Consent to communicate (including the risks to privacy) via email or text messages for professional purposes only is essential.

Consent for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists is stated in the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 8. Consent: Registered Dietitians obtain appropriate client consent in the provision of professional services.

Confidentiality and Record keeping

Dietitians need to ensure confidentiality of information around the collection, documentation, and storage of client information. Any risk of breach of confidentiality with the use of technology should be assessed and managed.

When using virtual or telephone communications with patients/clients, dietitians must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the personal health information of patients/clients is protected. One way to accomplish this is through the use of secure, encrypted technologies (7).

Health-specific platforms are usually regulated (privacy and security compliant) while more readily available consumer applications (e.g., Facetime, Skype) are unregulated and do not provide health system-level privacy and security compliance. If you have access to a regulated virtual care platform, CDA recommends this be used for patient care. If an unregulated platform is to be used, encrypted applications are preferential to unencrypted applications (including encrypted email). Follow employer guidelines, policies, and procedures where applicable.

Refer to *Standards of Practice*, Standard 11. Privacy and Confidentiality (as discussed above) and Standard 14. Record Keeping: Registered Dietitians document and manage client records and /or other data in compliance with applicable legislative, regulatory, and/or organizational/employer requirements. Please also refer to the Record Keeping section of *Guidelines for Self-employed Dietitians and Nutritionists* (5) found on the College website.

Please also refer to the *Virtual, Electronic Communications During the Pandemic* (7) guideline found on the College website for information on managing the security of messages on mobile devices.

Advertising

Dietitians advertise their business on company websites and/or on professional social media profiles. When advertising their business, Dietitians must adhere to the *Standards of Practice*, Standard 13. Promotion / Advertising: Registered Dietitians provide information and advertise their professional services and/or products in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements; this also includes avoiding the use of testimonials.

Dietitians must also follow the *Code of Ethics*, including Section 3.7 Advertising / Promotion and Endorsements, and other relevant sections. For example, when advertising or sharing information on websites or social media, dietitians must fairly give credit to or reference the works of others.

For more information on advertising and testimonial use, please refer to the *Guidelines for Promotion and Advertising* (5), available on the College website. For more information on working in a self-employed capacity, please refer to *Guidelines for Self-Employed Dietitians and Nutritionists* (6) on the College website.

Cross Border Dietetic Practice

Cross border practice refers to dietetic services performed across a Canadian provincial border where the dietitian providing the service is registered with the regulatory body in one province and is providing care to a client residing in another province. For the complete resource on Cross Border Practice, please see the College website (4).

Lawful Practice and Legal Jurisdiction

Laws and the regulation of health professionals vary from province to province, including with regard to virtual practice across provincial borders. Depending on legislation, a jurisdiction may have the requirement for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to register in the province where the client resides. Provincial regulatory bodies should advise Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to adhere to the regulatory requirements including registration requirements, and to adhere to practice statements / scope of practice in the province(s) where the client resides.

Registration Requirements

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists providing “cross border in person” dietetic services must be registered in the province in which the client resides. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing virtually across provincial borders must be aware of and comply with the registration requirements in the province where the client resides, as registration requirements vary province to province and may change over time.

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must respect privacy legislation in both jurisdictions. Therefore, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists providing virtual service to clients outside of Alberta are required to contact the regulatory body in the

jurisdiction the client resides to determine whether registration in that province is required, and to identify any other requirements to practice.

When a Registered Dietitian engages in virtual dietetic practice with a client outside of the province where they are registered (Alberta), it is generally accepted that the Registered Dietitian is held accountable to the college where they reside (CDA).

Law, Regulation and Practice Statements (4)

In cross border practice, Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must be aware of and comply with restricted activities (e.g. controlled practice activities, controlled acts, and scope of practice) and authorization practices in the province where the client resides, as well as the province where the Registered Dietitian resides.

1. If a province has a restricted activity, the Registered Dietitian must be registered in that province, and be authorized to perform that restricted activity in order to perform the restricted activity.
2. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must only practice within the practice statement / scope of practice for the province in which they are registered AND the practice statement / scope of practice for the province in which the client resides.

Additional considerations for Client-Centred Cross Border Practice (4)

In addition to the information provided above under Virtual Practice, cross border practice requires attention to several other concepts.

Accountability

It is generally accepted that the regulatory body where the dietitian is registered has jurisdiction over the conduct of the dietitian, wherever the conduct / virtual service occurs.

Transparency

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists providing or offering to provide services via virtual means across borders should inform clients of the jurisdiction where they are registered and the limitations of virtual practice. The client needs to understand that complaints about the Registered Dietitians' conduct would have to be made to the regulatory body in the jurisdiction where the Registered Dietitian is registered, and not necessarily the jurisdiction in which the client resides.

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists should use the title *Dietitian* to provide clarity to the public, as designations differ province to province, and title *Dietitian* is consistent across provinces.

For more information on cross border practice, please refer to *Cross Border Dietetic Practice in Canada* (4) found on the College website.

As discussed in Chapter 10 Record Keeping, safeguards must be taken when consulting or communicating with clients via email. Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must mitigate the risks associated with communicating with clients via email or other digital or virtual means.

Summary: How to Safely Practice Using Virtual or Social Media

The following are suggestions to assist Registered Dietitians and Registered Dietitians practice safely when using virtual tools and social media in professional practice:

Guidelines to Safeguard Against Unprofessional Conduct

Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists considering using social networking, blogs or other digital or virtual communication tools for personal or professional use should use the following guidelines to safeguard themselves against unprofessional conduct:

1. Adopt a “think before you post” attitude. Assume that anything you say may be seen by clients*, other professionals, employers, students, interns etc. NEVER post or discuss client specific information.
2. Always be mindful of your professional identity: what you say or post online personally could be tied to you as a professional and to your profession.
3. Do not put anything on your profile that you would not display for your supervisor, colleagues, clients or students/interns at your workstation.
4. Never betray the professional – client relationship. Contravention of confidentiality obligations may constitute unprofessional conduct as defined in the *HPA*.
5. Do not solicit or accept “friendships” with clients, their family members or with students/interns. Be mindful of appropriate professional – client boundaries.
6. Review your privacy settings regularly.
7. Ensure you are registered with the appropriate regulatory body if you are providing services to clients in another province/territory or internationally.

*Client is defined in the *Standards of Practice* as “an individual, family, substitute decision maker, team member, group, agency, stakeholder, government, employer, employee, business, organization, community, or population who is the direct or indirect recipient(s) of the Registered Dietitian’s expertise”. This definition includes a student as the client of the Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist.

8 Tips for Effective Social Media Communication (8)

Develop an online presence built on integrity so you can post, tweet, and blog nutrition messages and have a positive influence in the dietetics social media space:

1. **Show integrity.** Treat the statements you make online as if you're making them face to face.
2. **Remain authentic.** Always state who you are and who you represent when posting online.
3. **Stay civil.** If you disagree with a post, respectfully disagree while acknowledging different viewpoints, being considerate of diverse opinions.
4. **Take precautions.** Always safeguard personal information and remember that once information is posted online it stays online.
5. **Show professionalism.** Always remain ethical and keep professional and public lives separate. Be cognizant that behavior online affects the reputation of individuals, employers, and organizations as well as the profession as a whole.
6. **Keep information confidential.** It's not appropriate to divulge sensitive patient information or discuss clients in a way that violates their privacy.
7. **Value originality.** Posting trademarked or copyrighted content or intellectual property is never allowed. Give credit where credit is due by citing the source of your information and ideas.
8. **Scrutinize your online presence.** Monitor your virtual identity routinely to ensure your information is accurate and credible.

Chapter Summary

Social Media and digital tools are increasingly being used by professionals for sharing, accessing, and utilizing health information. Definitions and examples of social networking sites, blogs, microblogging, image and video sharing, apps, email and tele-/video-conferencing are discussed. Principles for professional social media conduct focus on adhering to the *Standards of Practice* and the *Code of Ethics*, particularly in the areas related to Trust in the Profession, Duty to Report, Confidentiality, Professional Boundaries, Communication and Consent. The benefits and limitations virtual dietetic practice, defined as the provision of professional service (e.g. counseling, providing information and advice, monitoring, etc.) which involves any type of intervention with a client who is remotely located from the dietitian providing the service is discussed. Considerations for cross border dietetic practice (defined as communication with clients or patients across provincial, territorial or national borders, via internet, email, telephone, videoconference or other electronic means) are reviewed. Registration requirements, accountability, transparency, and the duty to clients when practicing virtually are highlighted. The chapter concludes with Guidelines for Safeguarding against Unprofessional Conduct and Tips for Effective Social Media Communications.

Case Scenario 14.1

Before DD leaves the office, she goes on to Facebook to see what's new with her many friends. One of DD's friends, a former patient named JJ, asks how her day is going. Feeling a bit frustrated, DD vents, telling her about the "lazy patient she has been dealing with".

"This ridiculous patient refuses to take my advice", DD writes. "It's no wonder she is obese and has Diabetes. If she isn't going to take responsibility for her actions, then she probably should suffer the consequences and there will be no one to blame but her. She claims her weight problems started as a kid in Didsbury and she's always blaming her mother Shirley..."

DD goes on to write, "and the nurse on my team is so gullible, she buys into the moaning and complaining. She's totally incompetent and should be fired."

JJ can tell from DD'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 DD is referring to.

Another "friend" of DD's, a fellow Registered Dietitian, later reads DD's comments and feels uncomfortable with what she is reading but decides to let it go as she's seen this before.

Case Scenario 14.1 Questions

1. What aspects of the *Code of Ethics* are relevant or are in contravention in this case?
2. How is DD representing herself and/or the profession?
3. What, if any, obligations does DD's Registered Dietitian friend have in this case?

Chapter Quiz

1. Related to safe social media conduct, the most relevant aspects of the *Code of Ethics* for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to consider include all of the following **except**:
 - a. Duty to report
 - b. Professional Independence
 - c. Trust in the Profession
 - d. Confidentiality

2. All of the following statements related to safe social media conduct are true **except**:
 - a. The dietitian must not initiate or accept requests for online contact with clients, former clients, clients' family members nor students, unless it is for the purpose of direct client care.
 - b. The dietitian should familiarize themselves with privacy settings, remembering that settings can change and are not a replacement for responsible, discreet communication practices.
 - c. It is the dietitian's duty to report any type of unprofessional conduct by another regulated health professional including conduct via social media or in electronic practices, to the appropriate regulatory body
 - d. Sharing clients', colleagues', employers', students', or others' personally identifying information and/or using undermining language via social media is a contravention of confidentiality and may constitute unprofessional conduct, as defined in the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulations*.

3. Cross border dietetic practice:
 - a. Refers to electronic virtual communication with clients or patients within provincial, territorial or national borders.
 - b. Refers to communication and consultation between Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists or other health professionals across borders.
 - c. Requires Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing virtually across provincial borders to know every province's position with respect to registration requirements in the province where the client resides.
 - d. Requires that the public know that their Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist is registered and accountable to the Government of Canada.

References

1. Lexico: Powered by Oxford. Retrieved from https://www.lexico.com/definition/social_networking May 22, 2020.
2. Physiotherapy Alberta College & Association. “Practice Guideline: Use of Social Media”, November 2012.
3. Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors. 2018 Digital/Social Media Guidelines for Alberta Chiropractors. 2018.
4. College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Cross Border Dietetic Practice in Alberta*. 2019. Retrieved from: <http://collegeofdietitians.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Cross-Border-Practice-Position-Alliance-2019-May-30.pdf>
5. College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Guidelines for Promotion and Advertising*. Year. Retrieved from <http://collegeofdietitians.ab.ca> May 22, 2020.
6. College of Dietitians of Alberta. *Guidelines for Self-Employed Dietitians and Nutritionists*. Retrieved from <http://collegeofdietitians.ab.ca> May 22, 2020.
7. College of Dietitians of Alberta. *College Statement on Dietitians using Virtual, Electronic Communications*. 2020. Retrieved from <http://collegeofdietitians.ab.ca> May 22, 2020.
8. Barth C.M. and Seher S.L. 2012. “The Power of Social Networking: Here’s How You Can Use it to Market Your Brand.” Retrieved May 22, 2020 from: <http://www.todaydietitian.com/newarchives/050112p36.shtml>