

Ontario Psychological Association

**Guidelines For Best
Practices in the Use of
Social Media**

OPA Communications and Member Services Committee
March 2015

Table of Contents

Preamble	3
General Information.....	3
Guidelines	3
Professional Accounts	3
Use of Disclaimers.....	4
Friends, Followers and Connections.....	4
Confidentiality.....	4
Feeding the Trolls	4
Clarity of Messaging	4
Use of Accounts	4
Copyright Infringement	5
Defamation and Libel.....	5
Policy Revision	5
Resources	5

Acknowledgement

The OPA Communications and Member Services Committee would like to acknowledge with thanks the contributions of Drs. Mary Broga, Sylvain Roy, Jane Storrie, and Erika Portt in the development of this Guidelines document.



Preamble

Social media offers a cost-effective and immediate platform for education, communication, and marketing to an almost limitless audience. It can be a powerful tool for supporting OPA initiatives such as improved access to psychological services, informing the public about members' education, training, evidence-based psychological treatment approaches, and current research. Used wisely and strategically, social media can help advertise services available in members' individual practices, elevate the profession, and position the OPA as a mental health leader.

General Information

Some general guidelines to keep in mind when posting to social media on a professional basis include:

- Maintain the dignity of the profession.
- Be respectful of human rights and human diversity.
- Advocate for the mental health of all Ontarians.
- Be respectful of other professions.
- Use appropriate and professional language.
- Use careful judgement in terms of the relevance and appropriateness of posts.
- Avoid controversy.
- Link to relevant materials which meet these standards.

In addition, to enhance their relevance and profile on social media, members are encouraged to:

- post frequently;
- link to interesting articles and research;
- use relevant hashtags, keywords, and other means to increase the probability of posts being read, liked, or forwarded;
- be interesting, informative, entertaining, and enthusiastic.

Guidelines

Professional Accounts

While a LinkedIn account is primarily a professional listing, members should be careful to keep separate personal (for friends and family) and professional Facebook and Twitter accounts.



Use of Disclaimers

When OPA members post to their social media accounts, it is important that they do not imply that they represent the OPA or their employer without obtaining consent to do so.

Members may wish to include in their Twitter Bio or Facebook “About” Page a disclaimer that opinions expressed are their own, and not those of OPA or their employer, if applicable. For example:

- *“Tweets/Opinions/Posts my own.”*
- *“Posts reflect my personal opinion and not that of (employer).”*

Members may also wish to use a disclaimer that posts should not be construed as advice or psychological treatment.

Friends, Followers and Connections

While Twitter accounts are public and can be followed by anyone, Facebook and LinkedIn require approval of a friend or connection request, respectively. Members will need to make informed decisions about whom they choose to follow, or allow to become a friend or connection.

Determining whether it is appropriate to follow patients, or accept friend or connection requests from patients, requires a review of College Standards and the CPA’s Code of Ethical Conduct with respect to boundaries. Except in extraordinary circumstances, it may be prudent to adopt a policy of not accepting friend or connection requests from patients.

Confidentiality

Care must be taken to ensure that confidentiality is never breached online.

Feeding the Trolls

Given the anonymity offered through some social media platforms, negative or harassing messaging is common. A popular catchphrase is *“Don’t feed the trolls”*, which advises against responding to or engaging with those posting negative or inappropriate messages. Most platforms allow users to block offenders.

Clarity of Messaging

Potential problems arise when messages are unclear, antagonizing, or appear biased. Members are advised to review their messages for clarity before posting. Should there be a concern that a post may be misinterpreted; it should be deleted as soon as possible.

And while the point of social media platforms like Twitter is to communicate in almost *“real time”*, it is important to ensure that pressure to be timely does not undermine the careful consideration of posts.

Use of Accounts

Social media accounts should not be used for illegal purposes including, but not limited to, defamation, violation of intellectual property laws, violation of unfair competition laws or violation of criminal laws.



Copyright Infringement

Referring to an article or news item with typical reference citations, providing a brief quote, or offering a link to legitimate online published content is appropriate. Posting entire articles, without the permission of the author or publisher, may be considered copyright violation.

Defamation and Libel

During exchanges on social media, avoid personal attacks and characterizations that question a person's motives or qualifications. While debates about ideas are appropriate, personal attacks that may harm someone's reputation may be actionable as libel. Keeping criticism on an objective basis that is factually verifiable and skipping personal commentary about character, competence or motive minimizes legal risk.

Policy Revision

The OPA may from time to time establish and revise these Guidelines.

Resources

Brock University (for academics)

<http://www.brocku.ca/marketing-communications/social-media/guidelines>

Canadian Medical Association

[https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-](https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/CMA_Policy_Social_Media_Canadian_Physicians_Rules_Engagement_PD1_2-03-e.pdf)

[library/document/en/advocacy/CMA_Policy_Social_Media_Canadian_Physicians_Rules_Engagement_PD1_2-03-e.pdf](https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/CMA_Policy_Social_Media_Canadian_Physicians_Rules_Engagement_PD1_2-03-e.pdf)

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario

<http://rnao.ca/news/socialmediaguideline>