Increasing self-awareness when posting on social media sites

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ABSTRACT

At some point, most nurses have, or will post on Social media sites. Social media includes, but is not limited to Facebook, Snap Chat, You Tube and Twitter and allows instant communication, often without in-depth thought of professional consequences. The casualness and easy access to these forms of communication increase the likelihood that a nurse may innocently disclose information that could have a negative professional impact. For example, posting personal pictures on Facebook that share a recent social event that involved unprofessional behaviors. Social media posts of this nature are becoming increasingly prevalent and can be easily accessed, even by unintended viewers. Thus, social media posts, could link the nurse to the work environment which may directly violate professional conduct, mission and values of the institution. Additionally, self-awareness includes understanding that unintended viewers can disseminate content from posts, as opposed to being viewed on a friendly, casual manner. The associated consequences of unintended sharing of content from social media sites can be detrimental, including job termination.1]

2. CASE STUDY: INFORMAL POSTING ON FACEBOOK

RN Sue works on a busy inpatient unit in a major health care system. Sue recently attended a non-work related tail gate party. Many of Sue’s nurse friends working at various health care institutions attended. Sue and her friends compared work related stories, including staffing ratios, patient stories and wish lists for their respective work environments. As a result, signs were made with respective wish list slogans. Examples of signs included, “get more staff”, “patients deserve more attention”, and “nurses deserve better”. Sue posted selfies on her Face Book page while holding up each of these signs. A video post showed her holding up the signs while making negative comments about her employer in relationship to nurse’s pay, patient acuity, and hospital profit. The employers name was readily depicted on Sue’s shirt. The posts were viewed by friends of Sue, including co-workers. One co-worker interpreted the posts as ethically unsound due

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to derogatory comments about their shared employer. The
coworker attempted to share these concerns with Sue the
next day at work. Sue quickly defended the posts by saying
“she feels others should know how bad the work environ-
ment is at this place”. As a result of this interaction with
Sue, the coworker decided to share the posts with hospital
administrators.

The ANA clearly states, “Because of rapidly evolving com-
munication, technology, and the porous nature of social
media, nurses must maintain vigilance regarding posting,
images, recording, or commentary that intentionally, or unin-
tentionally breaches their obligation to maintain and protect
patient and/or employer rights to privacy and confidential-
ity”.[2]

Table 1 lists the implications of the case study.

Table 1. Case study implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurse Sue’s Actions</th>
<th>Co-worker’s Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be viewed as</td>
<td>May be viewed as “tattling” on a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unprofessional,</td>
<td>co-worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despite being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a social setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be viewed as</td>
<td>May be viewed as advocating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unethical</td>
<td>for the employer and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to making</td>
<td>maintaining professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derogatory</td>
<td>outside the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statements about</td>
<td>environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employer,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specifically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naming employer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the ethical issues in the case study.

Table 2. Ethical Issues in the Case Study

Co-worker
Believes Nurse Sue’s Facebook posts, statements, and behaviors
are in violation of the ANA Code of Ethics
Attempted to discuss concerns with Sue, to no avail, thus felt
compelled to bring concerns, including Facebook posts to
employer/administration

Table 3 reveals the core issues in this case study.

Table 3. Core issues in case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurse Sue’s Actions</th>
<th>Co-Worker’s Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did Sue do anything</td>
<td>Is co-worker motivated by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unethical via</td>
<td>maintaining professional integrity,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook posts?</td>
<td>including mission and values of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Sue violating</td>
<td>Does the sharing of Sue’s Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any aspect of the</td>
<td>posts lack professionalism or violate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANA Code of Ethics?</td>
<td>trust?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acting on questionable professionalism: This involves ex-
pressing the concern to the person involved (Sue), and focus-
ing on the employer’s best interest.

Table 4 shows the conflicts in code of ethics.

Table 4. Conflicts in code of ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-worker:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has an obligation according to the ANA Code (2015)[3] to address issue/concerns with Sue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a duty to alert Sue to how she may be in violation of the Code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 involves nurses maintaining environments that sup-
port each other and others in the fulfillment of their ethical
obligations.

Table 5. Ethical Obligation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurse Sue’s Actions</th>
<th>Co-worker’s Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sue’s actions could</td>
<td>Co-worker’s and others viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potentially create a</td>
<td>Facebook posts may hear details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture where others</td>
<td>about the work environment/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believe it is</td>
<td>employer that they did not want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acceptable practice (either</td>
<td>know which may influence their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within or outside the</td>
<td>future interactions with peers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work environment)</td>
<td>administrators or patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unless it is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. THE ROLE OF SELF-AWARENESS

A key attribute in maintaining professional integrity is self-
awareness. Self-awareness is the ability of an individual to
be mindful of behaviors, along with understanding emotions,
feelings and behaviors. Key attributes according to Sellas,[4]
include:

Understanding what is right in relationship to communica-
tion techniques, behaviors, interactions, maintaining control
when a situation or interpersonal interaction gets out of con-
tral, displaying therapeutic interpersonal interactions and
communication skills, taking personal responsibility for mis-
takes and appreciating team work and collaboration.

Additionally, the surge of instantly posting personal and/or
professional information on social media sites continues to
pose serious consequences, including possible violation of
specific elements of the ANA Code of Ethics. Creating
awareness on implications associated with seemingly inno-
cent, outside of work posts is crucial in order to maintain
professional integrity. Integrity in relationship to the individ-
ual, peers, employer and patient are all equally important,
according to the ANA Code of Ethics.

The ANA Code of Ethics[3] provides a roadmap for inte-
grating ethical behavior both within and outside the work
environment. Although the Code doesn’t specifically state
“how to act in social settings” it does infer the importance
of maintaining professionalism since an employee and em-
ployer can be readily linked, especially through social media
networking sites.

Implications for Practice Nurses should be aware of their specific employer’s social media policies. Additionally, professionals should be able to recognize their personal obligation to maintain professional integrity and employer integrity at all times. According to Sallas,[4] strategies to promote this type of self-awareness include:

- Having an understanding of the direct impact social media “social setting posts”;
- Thinking before posting anything that could be taken negatively or have ethical consequences;
- Using sound judgment when personally posting activities, events, or any type of personal information;
- Reviewing ANA Code of Ethics as applicable to social media/social networking;
- Striving to maintain a social media persona that is consistent with ANA Code of Ethics;
- Not making derogatory remarks about co-workers, employers, patients, or the work environment;
- Not using profanity, obscenities, racial, gender related, provocative, or other offensive comments.

4. SUMMARY
Participating in social media does not have to have a negative professional impact as long as nurses constantly remain self-aware of ethical implications, specifically the ANA Code of Ethics. Additionally, nurses must be aware of potential consequences of making derogatory or inflammatory employer comments via social media posts. Intentional or unintentional derogatory employer comments and unethical personal behavior via social media posts are likely to minimize professionalism of both the individual and employer. Likewise, self-awareness related to both state and federal laws is paramount.[5]

5. RELEVANCE TO CASE STUDY
According to this bible verse, the tongue can do a great deal of personal damage. This is especially true due to the power of the spoken word. In relationship to the case study, social media posts can be equated to the tongue. For instance, negative consequences associated with social media posts can be as devastating as the spoken word. Creating this type of awareness can prompt one to pause and think before clicking the “send” button or posting on any social media site in the same way as pausing to think about the power of the spoken word before blurting it out.

6. CONCLUSION
Social media provides huge opportunities for instantly and effectively communicating with others both personally and professionally. Throughout the social media communication process, nurses must be mindful of employer policies, possible HIPPA violations, ANA Code of ethics and professional standards of practice. Each of these areas should be considered both within and outside the work environment in order to maintain personal integrity at all times. Being self-aware and conscientious, nurses can enjoy the benefits of social media without negative consequences.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

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