

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Increasing self-awareness when posting on social media sites

Michelle Dellaria Doas *

School of Health Sciences, Chatham University, United States

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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 impact on his/her professional role.

Key Words: Social media, Self-awareness, Nursing

1. INTRODUCTION

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.^[1] 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

*Correspondence: Michelle Dellaria Doas; Email: mdoas@chatham.edu; Address: School of Nursing, Chatham University, United States.

to derogatory comments about their shared employer. The co-worker 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 environment is at this place”. As a result of this interaction with Sue, the co-worker decided to share the posts with hospital administrators.

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

Table 1 lists the implications of the case study.

Table 1. Case study implications

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

Table 2 shows the ethical issues in the case study.

Table 2. Ethical Issues in the Case Study

<p>Co-worker Believes Nurse Sue’s Facebook posts, statements, and behaviors are in violation of the ANA Code of Ethics</p> <p>Attempted to discuss concerns with Sue, to no avail, thus felt compelled to bring concerns, including Facebook posts to employer/administration</p>
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Table 3 reveals the core issues in this case study.

Table 3. Core issues in case study

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

Acting on questionable professionalism: This involves expressing 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

<p>Co-worker: Has an obligation according to the ANA Code (2015)^[3] to address issue/concerns with Sue</p> <p>Has a duty to alert Sue to how she may be in violation of the Code</p>
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Table 5 involves nurses maintaining environments that support each other and others in the fulfillment of their ethical obligations.

Table 5. Ethical Obligation

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

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 communication techniques, behaviors, interactions, maintaining control when a situation or interpersonal interaction gets out of control, displaying therapeutic interpersonal interactions and communication skills, taking personal responsibility for mistakes 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 innocent, outside of work posts is crucial in order to maintain professional integrity. Integrity in relationship to the individual, 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 integrating 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 employer 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]

Social Media, Self-Awareness, ANA Code, written and spoken posts can be equated to key themes with James 3: 5b-8. “How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire? And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison”.^[6]

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. Be 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.

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