



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Operating Standard

POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION Appropriate Use of Social Media

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Preamble

- 1 Social media platforms are utilized by patients and members of the public to search for information about health and healthcare. Patients share information with other patients, and with health professionals, regarding their health conditions. ¹

Physicians are governed by the same ethical and professional standards when communicating online as have always applied ¹

The ethical and professional standards that apply to physicians through provincial regulatory authorities or employers apply equally to social media interactions. ¹

Principles

- 2 Medical professionals have a duty to self-govern and ensure appropriate behavior with regard to privacy and confidentiality

Medical professionals must strike a reasonable balance between expressing opinions while still maintaining expected standards of professionalism & confidentiality

CPSA advises that its Code of Conduct applies to any environment in which physicians interact with patients, colleagues, learners and co-workers. This includes either by videoconference or online.²

Content posted on personal social media is the responsibility of the account owner, even when the owner is not the originator. Comments & postings must be considered permanent and publicly accessible. Once material is posted, the account owner may no longer control how and where the information is distributed, therefore context can be lost.

Postgraduate Medical trainees have multiple professional relationships in their capacity as students of the University of Calgary, employees of Alberta Health Services, and regulated members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. With respect to appropriate use of social media, Resident Physicians are bound by the policies set forth by all these institutions.

Social media providers cannot guarantee confidentiality: any post can be accessed and made public.

Scope **3** This Operating Standard applies to all learners in all postgraduate training programs

Definitions **4**

4.1 “Associate Dean” means Associate Dean of Postgraduate Medical Education in the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary. The Associate Dean is the Faculty member responsible for the overall conduct and supervision of PGME within the faculty.

“CFPC” means the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the body responsible for accreditation, examination and Resident certification for CFPC programs.

“CPSA means the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, the provincial regulatory authority responsible for the registration, regulation, and discipline of physicians in Alberta, Canada

“Medical Affairs” means the office within Alberta Health Services AHS responsible for professional credentials verification, clinical access provisioning, and administering the human resources transactions (including payroll) of the Resident Physicians’ Agreement.

“Program Director” means the person responsible for the overall conduct of a PGME Program in a discipline, and is responsible to the Associate Dean.

“Residency Training Program” means a RCPSC or CFPC accredited postgraduate medical education-training program in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary.

“Resident” means a physician registered in a PGME training Program administered by the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary and leads to RCPSC or CFPC certification.

“PGME Training Program” means any of CSM’s clinical and non-clinical programs of study that require a Resident to be registered in the RCPSC or CFPC accredited training programs and which require the Resident to complete a Placement, and may require an Instructor to participate in the Placement.

“Social media” means all web-based and mobile applications in which people can create, manipulate, share, or view text, audio, photos or videos. These media can be shared unidirectionally or multidirectionally.

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- 5.1 Professional boundaries with respect to patient interactions must be maintained in a manner equivalent to those established for in-person interactions. “Friending” patients on personal accounts for social media platforms is discouraged as this may cause difficulty in distinguishing personal from professional activities.
- 5.2 Individuals are to use their personal non-AHS email when using a personal social media account, and make a reasonable effort to indicate that their Social Media use is in a personal capacity rather than as a representative of AHS.
- 5.3 If a social media account is to be created to represent a facet of AHS, the development and ongoing management is to be completed through the communications department.³
- 5.4 PGME must make available to Residents reasonable resources with regard to appropriate use of social media. Links to resources will be posted to the PGME website and will include:
 - ❖ UofC Cumming School of Medicine Policies
[Professional Standards for Faculty Members and Learners](#)
 - ❖ UofC Code of Conduct
[UofC Code of Conduct - Human Resources](#)
 - ❖ CMA Policies
[CMA Policy on Medical Professionalism](#)
[CMA Code of Ethics](#)
 - ❖ CMA Code of Ethics
 - ❖ CPSA Policies
 - ❖ CPSA Code of Conduct - [cpsa.ca](#)
 - ❖ CPSA Standards of Practice – [cpsa.ca](#)
 - ❖ CPSA Advice to the profession (Social Media) -[cpsa.ca](#)
- 5.5 Residents must be familiar with and comply with AHS Social Media Policy. AHS policy and bylaws stipulates that failure to comply may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination³

- 5.6 The University of Calgary and Alberta Health Services policies and standards require individuals to clearly articulate when comments are being made in an official capacity on behalf of the organization.^{3,5}
- 5.7 Residents must be familiar with and abide by University of Calgary policy which provides as follows:”only individuals authorized by Media Relations (University Relations) may make official statements on behalf of the entire University of Calgary on Social Media channels. “⁵
- 5.8 Residents must consult with one of the following with regard to social media postings which are intended, or may be interpreted as being representative of these institutions.
- ❖ University of Calgary Media Relations
 - ❖ Cumming School of Medicine Communications
 - ❖ and/or Alberta Health Services Communications
- 5.9 Identifiable patient information, including images, must not be posted online or circulated using unsecured electronic communications. Information can be considered identifiable even if the individual patient is the only person who may be able to identify him/her self, based on the posted media.¹
- 5.10 Written consent for any and all information including images, video and audio recordings must be obtained unless disclosure without consent is authorized under the Health Information Act or Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Consent obtained for educational or academic purposes does not necessarily extend to consent for public dissemination.^{3,7,8}
- 5.11 Business, health and/or personal information of other AHS employees, contractors, patients/clients or another aspect of a position within AHS that you are not specifically authorized to disclose cannot be posted³
- 5.12 Offering diagnoses, providing medical advice, or support online is equivalent to entering into a physician-patient relationship. Therefore the obligations and limitations that apply to in-person consultations apply equally here. An educational license issued by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta restricts the provision of medical advice to a supervised teaching environment. Provision of medical advice by Residents outside this context is not within scope of an educational license.
- 5.13 Posting comments on social media which are demeaning or insulting to colleagues and co-workers is considered unprofessional behavior. Such comments contravene the University of Calgary and/or AHS harassment policies.^{4,5,6}
- 5.14 Behavior on social media which does not confirm with standards of CPSA, AHS, and/or the University of Calgary may be considered by a Residency Program in the context of the CanMeds Professionalism role and may also result in consultation with the Office of Professionalism, Equity and Diversity.
- 5.15 Breaches of Privacy may be directed to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta⁷

References

1. Canadian Medical Association, Social Media and Canadian Physicians – Issues and rules of engagement
2. CPSA code of conduct
3. AHS Bylaws, Policies, & Procedures: Social Media (#1139)
4. AHS Bylaws, Policies & Procedures: Respectful Workplaces and the Prevention of Harassment and Violence (#1115)
5. University of Calgary Policies & Procedures: Social Media Visual Identity Standards
6. University of Calgary Policy & Procedures: Harassment Policy
7. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Alberta)
8. Health Information Act (Alberta)
9. CMPA, Social Media: The opportunities, the realities

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