



Talking Ethics



Web 2.0: The Blurred Line Between vProfessional and Private

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The term “social media” (also known as Web 2.0) describes Internet-based technologies that allow users to interact and collaborate with others online. These applications include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. With this interactivity, social media is viewed as the interface of new technology and social communication to create (or co-create) new knowledge.¹ Social media is a wonderful tool for the dissemination of health information, as well as for engaging professionals to connect, communicate, and share resources in various platforms. CDHA recognizes that online communities are important and invaluable components of our overall communications strategy to connect, share with and learn from each other. We make every attempt to facilitate online interactions between CDHA, our members as well as the public via online platforms, such as, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Communities of Practice](#).

With the rapid growth of social media use, it is evident that it’s here to stay. Social media vehicles will continue to be integrated into both our personal and our professional lives. However, when we combine the use of technology with our social connections, the line between “private” and “public” is blurred.² The increased use of social media introduces a range of ethical considerations for dental hygiene practitioners.

There are many occasions when ethical distress may arise as a result of social media. Does your colleague vent about his or her workplace frustrations via Twitter? Are you unsure how much identifying information to provide when inquiring about a case on a listserv? Has a client invited you as a “Friend” on Facebook?

Social media networks are firmly in the public domain. The reach is wide and far, and often permanent. The information can be viewed by anyone, despite any privacy settings offered by the various social media sites. The critical consideration for dental hygienists who use social media is the privacy and confidentiality of the clients for whom they care. Confidentiality is a core principle in [CDHA’s Code of Ethics](#).

The “Principles” depict the broad ideals to which dental hygienists aspire and which guide their practice. The “Responsibilities” outlined on the following pages are more precise and provide direction for behaviours in ethical situations.

Confidentiality is the duty to hold secret any information acquired in the professional relationship. Dental hygienists respect a client’s privacy and hold in confidence information disclosed to them except in certain narrowly defined exceptions.³

Dental hygienists have a responsibility to demonstrate respect for the privacy of clients. In addition to this ethical consideration, dental hygienists also are to abide by federal, provincial, and territorial laws regarding the protection of personal health information. Difficulties arise when trying to find a balance between the differing concepts: social media encourages open interactions and immediate sharing of personal information, whereas privacy regulations are aimed at protecting client rights through firm and explicit standards regarding the use of such client information.⁴

