

Student Guidelines and Best Practices for On-line Communications

Memorial University, School of Pharmacy

Introduction

The School of Pharmacy is committed to supporting the right of students to interact knowledgeably, respectfully, and socially, when communicating online. The School strives to provide students with an environment of free inquiry and expression, wherein freedom of expression and academic freedom in electronic format has the same latitude as in any printed or oral communication. As such, all pharmacy students are responsible and accountable for their actions and statements. Students are expected to communicate online in a manner that upholds the standards and ethics of the pharmacy profession, and Memorial University's expectations of student conduct. The concept of professionals representing themselves online is known as e-Professionalism^{1,2}.

When communicating online it is important to keep in mind that any information on the internet, personal or professional, is public and may be shared with unintended recipients. Such information may be and has been used for pre-employment screening, evidence for disciplinary action, and grounds for legal action. For example: sharing confidential patient information via Facebook.

The use of any information without permission, confidential information, or unfounded, derogatory, or misrepresentative statements about the School of Pharmacy or its members (including other students, staff, faculty, preceptors, and guests), or practice placement sites or their members (including staff and patients) on the internet may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of the practice placement and/or expulsion from the pharmacy program.

Best Practices

- Statements made online will be treated as though they were made verbally in a public place.
- When communicating online, students are required to uphold the integrity and professionalism of the School.
- Students should ensure they maintain appropriate settings in order to optimize privacy and security, but also be aware that privacy is never guaranteed. For example: information may still be accessed through saved screen shots whether or not they are private.
- Unprofessional content, whether made by you or another, will reflect poorly on the student, the School, and the profession. Avoid any photos or posts in which you may be identified that may portray your professionalism or credibility in a negative light.
- **Students must avoid any online discussions about patients.** Even if all identifying information is excluded it is still possible to identify the person from the context. Privacy laws are in place (e.g., the [Personal Health Information Act](#)) to protect patients' right to confidentiality.

- **Under no circumstances** should students post a photo of a patient on social media without the written consent of the patient. Even if permission is obtained, the photo may be downloaded and distributed by others and in turn violate the terms of the permission.
- Students should avoid interactions with patients through online communications. This may compromise the patient relationship. As well security and confidentiality of the communication cannot be guaranteed.
- Students shall not share any confidential information about the School of Pharmacy or its members, or practice placement sites or their members.
- If students are developing websites, social networking groups, or writing blogs that will mention the School of Pharmacy or its members, students are advised to:
 - Identify that they are students and that the views expressed are theirs alone and do not represent the views of the School.
 - Not speak on behalf of School, unless given permission in writing to do so.
 - Contact the School's Communication Advisor beforehand to seek guidance.

Confidential Information

- If students have any questions or are unsure about whether information is confidential or public, it is important to speak with a preceptor, Practice Experience Coordinator, Manager of Academic Programs, Associate Dean or Dean of the School, and/or the Communications Advisor, as appropriate.

Respect and Privacy Rights

- Students are expected to speak respectfully about the School of Pharmacy and its members, and practice placement sites and their members. Students shall not engage in behaviour that will reflect negatively on the School of Pharmacy or the profession.
- The School encourages students to write accurately and knowledgeably, ensure they can support their statements and opinions with documented facts, and demonstrate professionalism.
- Despite disclaimers, internet interactions can result in members of the public forming opinions about the profession and the School.
- If students are dissatisfied with an aspect of their profession or education, they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the Associate Dean. Voicing concerns of this nature in an online forum is unprofessional.

Legal Liability

- **Students are legally liable for anything they write, present, or submit online.**
- Information shared on the internet is public and is not confidential.

- Students may be disciplined by the School of Pharmacy and/or Memorial University's Legal Office for commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or that can create a hostile work or learning environment.
- Students may be sued by any individual, agency, or organization that views their commentary, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or creating a hostile work or learning environment.

Questions?

Students should contact the School of Pharmacy Communications Advisor if they have any questions or require clarification.

These guidelines are adapted from:

1. Guidelines and Best Practices for Online Social Media Use by Student Pharmacists. University of California, San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences.
http://pharmacy.ucsd.edu/current/docs/policy/Social_Media_Guidelines.pdf Accessed: October 18, 2016
2. Cain J, Scott D, Akers P. Pharmacy students' Facebook activity and opinions regarding accountability and e-professionalism. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2009;73(6):104
3. Social Media Policy and Guidelines for Social Work Students, June 2016. Memorial University, School of Social Work. [http://www.mun.ca/socwrk/home/SOCIAL_MEDIA_POLICY - June 2016.pdf](http://www.mun.ca/socwrk/home/SOCIAL_MEDIA_POLICY_-_June_2016.pdf) Accessed: October 18, 2016
4. Social Media Guidelines. Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University.
<http://www.med.mun.ca/PGME/docs/Social-Media-Guidelines.aspx> Accessed: October 18, 2016

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