



ANTA SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

DEFINITIONS:

Social Media refers to any internet-based tool, created for users to upload and download information.

Social Media is distinct from Industrial Media, (such as newspapers, television, and film), which are created primarily for delivering one-way information to the visitor/consumer, and generally require significant resources, as well as adherence to standards and verification processes to publish information.

Social Media comprises relatively inexpensive and accessible tools that enable anyone (even private individuals) to publish or access information.

Social Media includes (although is not limited to):

- Social Networking & Micro-Blogging platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Weibo, etc.)
- Video and Photo Sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, Tumblr, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)
- Website Blogs (including sites hosted by 3rd parties, with a 'Comments' or 'Your Say' feature).
- Wikis and Online Collaborative Repositories (e.g. Wikipedia, etc.)
- Forums, Discussion Boards and Online Groups (e.g. Whirlpool, Quora, Reddit, etc.)
- Internal Communication technologies (e.g. Qmaster Chat, MS Sharepoint, Teams, etc.)
- Online Meeting & Conferencing Tools (e.g. Skype, Zoom, Viber, Whatsapp, Slack, Discord, etc.)
- Instant Messaging Technologies (e.g. Short Message Service (SMS), Messengers, etc.)
- Online Multiplayer Gaming & Streaming (e.g. Twitch, Ustream, Mixer, In-Game, etc.)
- Geo-Spatial Tagging platforms (e.g. Foursquare, etc.)

SCOPE & CONTEXT:

These tools and technologies facilitate the widespread publication and sharing of information, opinions, and digital files, and therefore readily constitutes engagement in public discourse, discussion, advertising, exchange of data, and public presentation, to a broad audience.

Therefore, whether an online activity is able to be viewed by the public or is limited to a specific group of people, health professionals (and students of association-approved courses) need to maintain professional standards and be aware of the implications of their actions, as in all professional circumstances.

Health professionals need to be aware that all information circulated on social media may end up in the public domain, and remain there, irrespective of the intent at the time of posting.

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Health practitioners should also be aware of their ethical and regulatory responsibilities when they are interacting online, just as when they interact in person.

This policy provides guidance to health practitioners on understanding their responsibilities and obligations when using and communicating on social media.

GUIDELINES:

When using Social Media, member health practitioners should remember that the National Law, National Code of Conduct for Registered and Non-Registered Health Professionals, Advertising guidelines (see section 133 of the National Law), ANTA's Code of Conduct, and ANTA's Privacy Policy, all apply.

Accredited Health Practitioners should only post information that is not in breach of these obligations by:

- complying with professional obligations
- complying with confidentiality and privacy obligations (such as by not discussing patients or posting pictures of procedures, case studies, patients, or sensitive material which may enable patients to be identified without having obtained consent in appropriate situations)
- presenting information in an unbiased, evidence-based context, and
- not making exaggerated, unethical or unsubstantiated statements or claims.

Note: Additional information may be provided from professional bodies and/or employers, which aims to support health practitioners' use of social media. However, the legal, ethical, and professional obligations that accredited health practitioners must adhere to are set out in ANTA's policies and guidelines.

Whether using Social Media for official use, or in a private capacity, members must not do anything which could bring themselves or the profession into disrepute.

It should be noted that the nature of social media means the following **private** activities may increase the risk of reputational damage and therefore require caution and discretion:

- posting personal images, information or links
- disclosing one's own and others' personal information
- expressing approval or disapproval of individuals or organisations (especially within the practitioner's professional network)
- engaging in public debate, particularly about or involving the profession (such as with journalists, authorities or public figures)

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Note: As part of ANTA's Codes of Conduct members have a professional responsibility to provide an inclusive and supportive environment, free from discrimination, harassment or bullying, in their use of social media and all public interaction.

All ANTA members are personally responsible for any content they post online using social media sites or other electronic communications.

POLICY SUMMARY FOR REVIEW

1. Professional Obligations

The National Code of Conduct contains guidance about the required standards of professional behaviour, which apply to accredited health practitioners whether they are interacting in person or online.

Health practitioners are expected to behave professionally and courteously to colleagues and other practitioners, including when using social media.

The National Code of Conduct also articulates standards of professional conduct in relation to privacy and confidentiality of patient information, including when using social media.

For example, posting unauthorised photographs of patients in any medium is a breach of the patient's privacy and confidentiality, including on a personal Facebook site or group even if the privacy settings are set at the highest setting (such as for a closed, 'invisible' group).

2. Legal Obligations Related to Advertising

Section 133 of the National Law imposes limits on how health services delivered by registered health practitioners can be advertised.

These limits apply to all forms of advertising, including through social media and on the internet.

For example, the National Law prohibits the use of testimonials in advertising. (Testimonials should be removed from all publicly viewable locations in the control of the practitioner)

The *Advertising guidelines* provide further guidance about how the legal restrictions on advertising under the National Law and other relevant legislation apply to social media.

REFERENCES

AHPRA Codes of Conduct (for Registered Health Professionals)

COAG National Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Professionals.
<https://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/NationalCodeOfConductForHealthCareWorkers>

Kerridge, Lowe & Stewart (2013). *Ethics and Law for the Health Professions* 4th Edition.

Michael Weir (2016). *Law and Ethics in Complementary Medicine* 5th Edition.