

Social Media Use from a Regulatory Perspective

Over the recent months the College has received several calls from members of the public regarding the online actions of several Alberta Registered Dental Hygienists. As a result, the College would like to remind all regulated members that being professional is an expectation of CRDHA and this expectation extends beyond the confines of the workplace and workday.

Regulating social media use is a topic that professional regulators across the globe are contending with. Regulators cannot, and should not, ignore unprofessional online conduct. The challenge is in striking a balance between fairness and the constitutional rights of the individual within new and changing societal norms with the duties and expectations that a health professional provides safe, effective, evidence-based care to the public and represents the profession favourably to the public at all times.

The public complaints we have received regarding the social media activities of some registrants prompted the College to accelerate its timeline to draft a social media guideline which will then go to Council for review and approval by the end of 2020, or early 2021. Social media guidelines are not a new concept in the regulatory world – several health and non-health professions in the province already have guidelines in place. Until our guideline is approved, in the meantime, we reference our [Practice Standards](#) and [Code of Ethics](#) for your guidance.

Practice Standards:

- 1.14 Access and use evidence-based knowledge that is current, relevant, and credible through analyzing and interpreting the literature and other resources.

Code of Ethics: Principle 2 – Veracity and Integrity

Dental hygienists:

- 2.9 will conduct any advertising and promotional activity, including the use of social networks and other electronic media, in accordance with applicable legislation, the *Code of Ethics*, and acceptable professional standards.
- 2.9.1 shall not make a representation to the public, through advertisement promotional activity, endorsement, inducement or otherwise,
 - 2.9.1.1 that is, in any respect, false, inaccurate, misleading, not objectively verifiable, contrary to the public interest or harmful to the integrity of the profession of dental hygiene;
 - 2.9.1.2 that creates fear, takes advantage of client insecurities, misstates or exaggerates potential health benefits of any service or product or creates an unreasonable expectation as to the results that will be achieved by using any service or product;

While the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal delivered its decision on October 6th in the case of Strom v Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, overturning the association's finding of unprofessional conduct by nurse Carolyn Strom that came about after her comments posted on Facebook, it is important to note that regulation of off-duty conduct is not new. The courts have repeatedly confirmed

that off-duty conduct by a regulated professional may give rise to discipline where behaviour deviates from the high standards of conduct essential to the reputation of their profession, and this certainly applies to the dental hygienists profession in Alberta. The College, therefore, reminds you of the expectation that your behaviour, including your actions on social media, should remain professional at all times.

To learn more about Strom v Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association visit:

<https://canliiconnects.org/en/summaries/54802>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/we-should-all-be-watching-the-carolyn-strom-appeal-1.5284566>