



## Privacy, pharmacy, and social media: you can have it all

Social media provides great opportunities to educate patients and the public and interact with colleagues, but building and maintaining a professional relationship in this environment can be challenging. Social media platforms are highly accessible, informal, and public, and raise important questions about the steps you should take to uphold your professional image and obligations while online. ACP expects regulated members to comply with all existing professional expectations when using social media.

## Tips to protect yourself, your profession, and your patients online

Social media can play an important role in enhancing patient care, professional education, professional competence, and collegiality, among other potential benefits. ACP recommends that, while engaging in social media, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians follow these simple rules:

1. Always exercise common sense and professional judgment.
2. Assume that all online content in both personal and professional accounts is public and accessible to everyone.
3. Do not provide professional services or clinical advice to specific patients through social media. You may, however, use social media to disseminate generic health information for educational or information sharing purposes.
4. Be cautious if posting information online that relates to an actual patient. The privacy and security of individual patient information is paramount. Ensure you comply with legal and professional obligations to maintain privacy and confidentiality. If the information you post would allow others to identify the patient, then this would be considered a violation of patient privacy.
5. Be transparent. Clearly identify who you are and identify any conflicts of interest you may have in conjunction with the information you provide.
6. Protect your reputation, the reputation of your profession, and the public trust by not posting content that could be viewed as unprofessional. Remove any content already posted by you which may be viewed as unprofessional. Keep in mind that prospective employers and patients often check your online presence, and unprofessional posts have resulted in complaints being submitted to ACP.
7. Refrain from establishing personal connections with patients or people closely associated with them online, as this may not allow you to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and may compromise your objectivity. It is acceptable to create an online connection with patients for professional purposes only.
8. Refrain from seeking out information about your patient that may be available online.
9. Understand the technology you are using. Know the site or app's terms and conditions. Know how to edit and delete posts if possible. Apply the strictest privacy settings necessary to maintain control over access to your personal information.
10. If you are an employee of an organization that has a social media policy, be familiar with that policy.
11. Remember that social media platforms are constantly evolving; be proactive in considering how professional expectations apply in any given set of circumstances.
12. Remember that all of these guidelines apply not only when you are posting to your own sites, but when you participate in or comment on other people's social media posts, forums, blogs, and shared videos.
13. Refrain from online comment on the practice of another health professional in any way that could reveal the identity of that person.

