



# RISK WISE ANSWERS

## What risks might be associated with the use of social media by midwives?

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*... a former client has invited me to be her “friend” on Facebook... I have been thinking of developing a LinkedIn profile to connect with other professionals or an Instagram account to promote my practice... I’ve been monitoring a blog for expectant mothers and would like to comment or offer advice from my perspective as a registered midwife...*

As technology and access to the internet grows, social media and networking websites create opportunities for midwives, such as staying connected with their communities or promoting their practices. However, these opportunities do not come without risk and midwives considering the use of social media should proceed with caution. Midwives need to be mindful of their professional and ethical obligations with respect to privacy and professional working relationships when making decisions about their online presence. The same guidelines and principles that apply to “in person” relationships also apply to the “virtual” relationships created online. For further information, please review the BCCNM’s [Guideline for Participating in Social Media](#).

Midwives should treat any online social media or networking sites as public spaces where information can be viewed and further disseminated by others without permission of the original poster. Even if the midwife thinks information is being housed in a secure environment, there should be no expectation of privacy as it can be copied and reposted, sometimes even within a very different context than what was intended. Midwives should be wary of posting even de-identified stories or photographs of their experiences with clients online since this could be a breach of confidentiality if the client or family recognize themselves in the post.

Participation in professional forums or blogs may also appeal to many midwives. The opportunity to apply their expertise in discussions with peers or other interested parties may be very tempting. Again, midwives need to be mindful of their confidentiality obligations if drawing on real life experiences with clients. Midwives should also consider the extent to which others may rely on the information and advice they post in

forums or blogs and whether it could be seen as having established a professional relationship with such individuals.

The sharing of personal information via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube or Flickr even after the midwife-client relationship has ended can blur the boundaries of a professional working relationship. Midwives need to be careful not only about what type of information they post about themselves and their clients, but also the extent of client-posted information they access. It is not usually beneficial to professional relationships for a midwife to make detailed personal information about herself available to her clients. Similarly, clients may post far more personal information on their websites than midwives need to know in order to provide care. Midwives must bear in mind that anything posted online is publicly accessible and should be comfortable that it could be viewed by past and current clients, potential clients, employers, legal counsel and review boards.

Social media can be an effective communication tool to connect with colleagues, clients or others but also has its drawbacks. Midwives who engage in social media should see it as an extension of their professional practice and conduct themselves accordingly. By using common sense and adhering to professional practice confidentiality standards and appropriate internet or site security protocols, midwives should be able to reap the rewards of social media while avoiding the pitfalls.

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