

Policy

Subject: Use of Social Media in Pathology Practice
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Introduction

The purpose of this Policy is to help Fellows and members understand their responsibilities and obligations when using and communicating on social media.

'Social media' describes the online and mobile tools that people use to share opinions, information, experiences, images, and video or audio clips and includes websites and applications used for social networking. Common sources of social media include, but are not limited to, social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, blogs (personal, professional and those published anonymously), True Local and microblogs such as Twitter, content-sharing websites such as YouTube and Instagram, and discussion forums and message boards.

The interest in using social media networking sites among Fellows and members is increasing and can be an effective way to interact not only with each other but also with clinicians in many fields, students, patients and even the general public.

The ability to reach a wide audience via Social Media is large given that the vast majority of Australians own a smartphone, with an even higher penetration rate expected in coming years. Healthcare organisations are rapidly integrating the use of social media into their education, outreach and marketing strategies. Whilst the College supports Fellows and members in their interactions on social media, they must be aware of potential privacy issues. Even innocent-seeming posts, tweets, pins or shares can breach patient confidentiality if a specific patient can be identified by any details regardless of whether the usual identifiers such as name and date of birth are removed.

Guidelines

When using social media, the following guidelines apply for protecting patient privacy:

- Fellows and members should be aware of their obligations under the College's [RCPA Guideline: Managing Privacy Information In Laboratories](#) and other relevant legislation such as Section 133 of the AHPRA National Law. Fellows and members with social networking accounts should carefully review content regularly to make sure that all material complies with their obligations under the relevant guidelines and laws.
- All material published on the web should be considered public and permanent. Nothing should be posted that would not be appropriate in a public forum, and all content should be respectful and professional.

- Fellows and members are responsible for content on their social networking pages even if they were not responsible for the initial publication of the information or testimonial. This is because a person responsible for a social networking account accepts responsibility for any comment published on it.
- Friending patients on social media, engaging with patient through their personal social media profile and answering their questions posted online are not advised.

With responsible use of social media, the minimal risk to patients is adequately mitigated, and thoughtful efforts have the potential not only to increase public understanding of pathologists' roles in diagnosis and patient care but also to advance education amongst colleagues and other clinicians.

Other related Policy:

[The Medical Board of Australia: Social Media Policy](#)