

Consensus Statement: **Social Media**

The New Zealand College of Midwives considers all midwives and midwifery students should ensure professionalism in all on-line postings, sharing and other on-line activity.

Definition:

Social media is the platform by which information and ideas can be created and shared using online networks and virtual communities ¹, e.g. Facebook, Twitter

Rationale:

The purpose of this document is to support midwives to maintain professional boundaries when using social media.

Practice Notes:

- If midwives use social media sites they should do so with caution and avoid inappropriate professional and clinical related discussion ²
- It is paramount that the privacy of clients and colleagues are protected at all times. Women may share their health issues and accounts openly on their own social sites but midwives as health professionals are required to maintain confidentiality and should not share clients' information without their permission. This includes anonymous reference to practice experiences or cases ³
- Midwives should contact women or potential clients directly and not provide practice advice to them through any social media sites
- It is important that midwives maintain their integrity as midwives and members of the profession; social media does not differentiate between personal and professional posts. Professional standards should be upheld in all communications regardless of the medium

If/when considering using social media midwives should:

- Always consider the (whole) audience who may potentially be friends of friends ⁴ or friends of clients or potential clients
- Keep all comments and posts positive and ensure that social media sites are not used to address concerns or vent frustrations
- Remember that anything posted anywhere on social media can be quickly and easily shared with a large number of people
- Be aware that any information shared may also be permanently available to the world; even if it is quickly deleted it may have already been copied or may be retrievable
- Be aware of the appropriate privacy and security settings on all social media sites
- Be aware of and adhere to any social media policy that employers or practice colleagues may have in place

When social media becomes negative

- If unfavourable comments about individual midwives or the profession are posted online it is important that:
 - All comments should be kept in perspective and addressed calmly and logically. Ensure women have access to formal feedback mechanisms for the profession such as consumer feedback forms and resolutions committees
 - All communications should remain professional and respectful
 - Any links that could be considered negative or derogatory should be removed from personal pages/sites

- Pause before posting any comments, consider comments carefully and ensure the message has the correct meaning before posting
- Never post when angry or upset and don't shout (using capital letters)
- Where possible report unfavourable comments to the moderator of the website or seek advice from the College. If the comments could be considered defamatory (defamation is the act of making untrue statements about another which damages his/her reputation ⁵) midwives should seek legal advice.

References:

- ¹ Fisher, J. and M. Clayton, *Who Gives a Tweet: Assessing Patients' Interest in the Use of Social Media for Health Care*. Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing, 2012. **9**: p. 100-108.
- ² Midwifery Council of New Zealand, *Midwifery Council Code of Conduct*. 2010.
- ³ New Zealand College of Midwives, *Midwives Handbook for Practice*. 5th ed. ed. 2015, Christchurch: New Zealand College of Midwives.
- ⁴ Oxford Dictionaries. *Definition of "friend" in this context is "A contact on a social networking website"*. Available from: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.
- ⁵ Law.com. *Definition of "defamation"*. Available from: <http://dictionary.law.com/>.

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Ratification:

This statement was ratified at the NZCOM AGM on 30/07/15

The purpose of New Zealand College of Midwives Consensus Statements is to provide women, midwives and the maternity services with the profession's position on any given situation. The guidelines are designed to educate and support best practice. All position statements are regularly reviewed and updated in line with evidence-based practice.