

## Clinical Conundrum

Addressing questions related to ethical and clinical practice issues in speech-language pathology and audiology

We live in an age of social media. Technology enables us to do many things, often more quickly and effortlessly than in the past. Global social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter offer opportunities for conversation and engagement, however *“it also implies a degree of informality in which the lines between personal and professional, as well as public and private, can be easily blurred”* (Alberta Health Services, 2012, p. 2).

The following situations were adapted from practice scenarios which appeared in *CASLPO Today*, Winter 2011 issue.

### Situation 1

**Question:** I read in the paper that a woman lost her job because she posted online that she was going to a celebration that night and, expecting to be out late, planned to call in “sick” to work the next day, which she did. Can an employer really fire someone for that?

**Answer:** Employers can set policies that allow them to take disciplinary action for misconduct, insubordination, absenteeism, or other reasons typically outlined in employment agreements. The individual who was fired in this situation failed to recognize that anything posted online – a comment or a picture, on a blog or any social network – can essentially be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. Before adding that picture or tweeting that line, ask yourself, “Would you say or do what you are about to post, in front of your employer or a client?”

### Situation 2

**Question:** I have enjoyed many great conversations with the mother of one of my clients; we have a good rapport and many interests in common. Recently when I logged into my Facebook account, I saw that I had a “friend request” from this person. I do not want to insult her by not accepting the request, but I’m not sure if it’s appropriate to do so?

**Answer:** Technology can blur the lines of distinction between personal and professional relationships. For this reason, accepting or initiating “friend requests” on social media is typically not recommended. While you are treating this woman’s child, you have a responsibility to maintain a therapeutic relationship.

As a professional, it is also up to you to explain to the mother that you cannot have a personal relationship while treating her child as that may place you in a conflict of interest. ACSLPA’s *Code of Ethics* states:

### Accountability

In providing services to clients and the public, members:

- Avoid real or perceived conflict of interest in which their professional integrity, professional independence, or the provision of professional services could be influenced or compromised.

More simply put, your personal relationship with the client’s mother may result in the client receiving preferential treatment or it may appear that way to others who would see you listed as her “Facebook friend”.

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### Situation 3

**Question:** Can I advertise on Facebook? What about having a profile on LinkedIn?

**Answer:** There are no restrictions on the type of medium used to advertise a private practice. However, regardless of the format or technology, you are responsible for adhering to ACSLPA's *Code of Ethics* in relation to promotion and advertising:

#### Accountability

In providing services to clients and the public, members:

- Ensure that their promotion(s), sales and fees for products and/or services for clients are appropriate and fair;
- May promote the professions to the public in a manner that informs the public of communication disorders and services;
- May advertise their professional services in a way that is ethical, accurate, and truthful.

Further, members will:

- Provide a reasonable statement of prognosis rather than any guarantee of outcome.

#### References

Alberta Health Services (2012). *Social Media: Ethical and Practical Considerations for Health Care*.

Jones-Drost, M. & Bock, C. (2011). Practice scenarios: Practicing in the age of social media. *CASLPO Today*, 9 (1), 8-9.

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We welcome your thoughts on this or any other clinical conundrum! Readers are encouraged to submit both their comments and their ethical clinical issues in question format to [slp@acslpa.ca](mailto:slp@acslpa.ca) for SLP related issues and [audiology@acslpa.ca](mailto:audiology@acslpa.ca) for audiology related issues.

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