



August 2022

E-Professionalism on Social Media

Question: I am on Twitter and follow some accounts of individuals engaged in advocacy for Alberta's healthcare and education systems. I would like to add my perspective to some of the conversations happening online, but I don't know if being critical of the government or a public employer will get me in trouble with the College. Can I participate in conversations around advocacy on social media?

As an ACSLPA regulated member, you are uniquely placed to advocate for, challenge, or criticize public services or policies. Regulated speech-language pathologists and audiologists have the knowledge, expertise, and experience relevant to public service systems, such as healthcare and education, which enable them to make informed criticisms and pursue positive change within these systems.

ACSLPA has a duty to safeguard the public interest, which extends to the protection of the standing or reputation of the professions within the public sphere, and this may include situations where a regulated member's online speech has a negative impact on the public or the professions. Nevertheless, the College appreciates members' rights to participate in online discourse, and that this is an important aspect of personal autonomy, freedom of expression, and democracy. The College also recognizes online forums (e.g., social media sites or applications) are the most common and convenient method for engaging in political and social advocacy and discourse. As a result, ACSLPA has developed guidance for regulated members who wish to engage in social and political discourse.

Regulated members should be mindful that the use of their qualifications and/or professional title affects the weight of their message in the public. They should exercise caution and include their qualifications and/or professional title only when it is relevant and appropriate to the message and/or content being posted online, and when they wish to identify themselves as a regulated health professional. However, members should be aware that even when they post online using their personal voice, readers of their posts may not be able to separate the member's personal and professional identities. Members should also be mindful that once content is posted, it should be considered public, as information can be widely and quickly spread through various sharing functions (e.g., retweeting, reposting, or sharing screen shots).

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Therefore, in order to maintain professionalism in online political and social discourse, members should:

- Ensure client privacy and confidentiality is maintained and protected;
- Communicate in a manner that is courteous, tactful, and treats all persons with respect;
- Avoid personal criticism of individuals;
- State their concerns in an objective, non-inflammatory manner;
- Provide verifiable, high-quality evidence based on science or direct experience;
- Provide accurate, complete, and relevant information;
- Ensure they do not provide misleading or deceptive information;
- Acknowledge and be transparent about any qualifications or limitations that apply to any information provided;
- Ensure they do not misrepresent their qualifications when sharing content related to scientific, medical, or clinical claims;
- Acknowledge other legitimate views and provide thoughtful, fair, and balanced commentary;
- Ensure any advocacy or criticism furthers or enhances the public interest (i.e., it does not undermine public confidence or harm the public);
- Comply with all regulatory expectations;
- Ensure any posts, even personal, do not jeopardize the public's view of the member as a professional or their profession as a whole;
- Consider using a disclaimer stating the posts are a personal opinion and do not represent those of the profession or employer; and
- Take steps to mitigate any conflicts of interest.

In addition, regulated members are reminded they may be bound by their employer policies and procedures for reporting or communicating concerns and voicing their opinions on matters that impact their work, the professions and/or the public. Members should review their employer's policies and procedures in relation to online communication. A violation of an employer policy is *not* necessarily the same as a professional conduct issue for ACSLPA. In these situations, ACSLPA is primarily focused on professional conduct rather than employee/employer matters.

