



## Draft Social Media Standards and Practice Guidelines for Dietitians in Ontario

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### **Introduction**

Social media<sup>1,2</sup> is a broad term used to define forms of electronic communication, including websites or applications for social networking and blogging through which dietitians may personally and/or professionally create and share information, ideas, messages, and content (e.g., text, video, audio and/or images) and/or provide comments and reactions to the social media posts of other users. Social media may include blogs, vlogs, wikis, message boards, chat rooms, forums, podcasts, electronic polling, social bookmarking, clouds, social networking (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn) and video platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) and more.

Social media platforms and technology are constantly evolving, and while the platforms and terminology may change (e.g., "sharing" or "liking" a "post" and the ways that people can interact on various platforms), the concepts provided in these Standards and Practice Guidelines apply to all social media use.

Social media<sup>3</sup> can be used for several reasons in dietetic practice, including:

- Increasing dietitian capacity to reach the public, clients and their families with timely, high-quality health and nutrition information and resources;
- Answering questions and obtaining feedback from clients, families and the public;
- Raising public awareness of key nutrition issues;
- Promoting and advertising upcoming events, programs, or dietetic services available;
- Providing education to nutrition students and dietetic practicum students;
- Networking with other professionals and sharing educational information;
- Creating common interest groups on nutrition topics; and
- Creating communities of practice to support health professionals and clients.

**Purpose:**

The Standards and Guidelines articulate key principles for social media practice. The fundamental goal of the *Social Media Standard and Guidelines* for Registered Dietitians is to set out expectations for the professional conduct of dietitians while using social media. Standard statements articulate the minimum level of performance expectations for the professional conduct of dietitians while using social media, followed by a list of how the Standard is demonstrated in practice. The practice guidelines articulate best practice suggestions for safe, competent, and ethical dietetic practice.

The *Social Media Standards and Guidelines* are not for use in isolation. Together with relevant legislation, the [Code of Ethics](#), other [College Standards and Guidelines](#), the *Social Media Standards and Guidelines* serve dietitians, the College and its Committees when considering dietitian practice or conduct. Dietitians should also consider their organizational and/or employer social media policies.

Social Media Standards and Guidelines may be used for several purposes, including:

1. To inform the public, employers, other health care providers and dietitians about the expectations dietitians should meet when using social media in their dietetic practice.
2. To help guide the College's decision-making in matters related to the professional conduct of dietitians in diverse practice settings.
3. To support compliance with dietitians' required standards and performance expectations surrounding professional behaviours when communicating using social media.
4. To fulfill the College's regulatory mandate of public protection.

Social media can be a valuable tool for health professionals to communicate, collaborate and share information. However, there are also risks. Following a principled approach for [risk reduction](#) and [public protection](#), Standard statements define the minimum expectations, and the practice guideline statements provide best practice suggestions.

Dietitians can refer to the Social Media Standard and Guidelines – Practice Scenarios for accompanying guidance, highlighting risks and challenges that dietitians may face while using social media. The scenarios illustrate, through practical examples, an application of the principles and how dietitians can apply the Standards and Guidelines personally and professionally in relation to social media use<sup>2</sup>.

**Principle 1: Personal and Professional Use of Social Media**

This Standard and Guideline focuses on a dietitian's professional use of social media, but it may also apply to personal use. As regulated health professionals, dietitians are responsible for abiding by the [Code of Ethics](#) and [Professional Practice Standards](#). This commitment to public protection requires dietitians to be mindful of their professional practice at work, at home, and in public.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that off-duty conduct can be considered in investigations and discipline, where a sufficiently negative impact on the profession and the public's interest can be demonstrated<sup>4</sup>. Dietitians are responsible for balancing their responsibilities as regulated health professionals with their right to freedom of expression in their private lives<sup>5,6</sup>. While personal accounts can provide limited access through strong privacy settings, dietitians should consider that even private posts, or content and comments made in "private/closed" groups or via direct message may have the potential to be public and accessible to all and potentially subject to regulatory investigation and discipline. Generally, the College's interest lies in regulating actions performed within the scope of practice. There are times, however, when a dietitian's private life can have potential implications for public protection and may be within the purview of the College for its public protection mandate. This could apply where a dietitian's actions impact professional ethics or public safety, whereby the College would have a legitimate public protection interest in regulating the behaviour.

**Standard Statement for Personal and Professional Use on Social Media**

**Standard 1:** Dietitians must identify themselves in a transparent manner that is identifiable to the public when [practising dietetics](#) via social media as per the [Professional Misconduct Regulation](#).

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. Dietitians use the same name that appears in their profile on the College Register of Dietitians and their professional designation, including either Registered Dietitian, RD or the French equivalents when [practising dietetics](#) via social media.

## Practice Guidelines for Personal and Professional Use on Social Media

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians may decide to maintain separate personal and professional accounts, and it is important to be mindful that professional and personal are only sometimes distinguishable. When posting personally, one's registration as a dietitian may be known, and/or dietitians may share personal details on their professional accounts. When posting, consider overall conduct and communication that maintains the profession's reputation, upholds a culture of respect and trust with the public and does not harm the public or negatively impact client care<sup>6,7</sup>

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians may consider providing a disclaimer when representing personal views, particularly unrelated to the profession or views that could affect the public's trust in the profession. For example, *"The posts on this site are my own opinions and do not necessarily represent the position, opinions and behaviour of other dietitians or the profession in general."*<sup>6</sup>

## **Principle 2: Professionalism and Social Media Conduct**

Practicing dietetics requires upholding the [Code of Ethics](#), including beneficence (to do good), non-maleficence (do no harm), respect for persons/justice and respect for autonomy, all of which guide evidence-informed dietetic practice. Dietitians' interactions with clients and colleagues demonstrate values such as honesty, reliability, and compassion. Dietitians gain the trust of their clients, practicing with cultural humility and providing culturally safe care. The same principles of professionalism used by dietitians in face-to-face communications apply to social media, including professional judgment and critical thinking.

## Standard Statements for Professionalism and Social Media Conduct

**Standard 2:** Dietitians must demonstrate professionalism, constructive dialogue, and civility in all professional communications, including when using social media.

### **A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. Dietitians must conduct themselves respectfully and in a professional manner that does not impact the delivery of quality dietetic services, the safety or perceived safety of others while using social media<sup>7</sup>. Others include but are not limited to the public, clients, colleagues, supervisors, employers, educators, professors, mentors, students or a regulatory body<sup>5</sup>. Dietitians are accountable to the public they serve, their colleagues in the profession and the College.

**Standard 3:** Dietitians must consider their social media conduct and how it affects their own reputation, the reputation of the profession, including how it impacts the public trust<sup>7</sup>. While

disagreements or conflicts can arise in professional practice, dietitians must act respectfully while using social media for advocacy.

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by:**

- i. avoiding unprofessional, disgraceful, or dishonourable behaviour. Examples of unprofessional, disgraceful, or dishonourable behaviour<sup>7</sup> may include, but are not limited to:
  - language towards others that includes profanity, is disrespectful, insulting, intimidating, humiliating, or abusive.
  - bullying, attacking, harassing, and making comments that may be, or perceived to be disparaging to others, unsubstantiated and/or defamatory<sup>1</sup>, hate speech (related to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, economic status, disability, weight, or level of education), or discriminatory (e.g., racism, transphobia, sexism).
  - Posting inappropriate photos, reels, stories, and comments (e.g., alcohol and/or drug impairment while practicing)<sup>5</sup>.
- ii. recognizing their professional obligation to report to the College and others as relevant (e.g., employer), incidents of unsafe or unethical conduct of dietitians that may cause harm to the public as per the [Professional Misconduct Regulation](#). Examples may include but are not limited to discriminatory language, sharing client personal health information without informed consent, and sharing misleading or deceptive information.

**Standard 4:** Dietitians must comply with the law when using social media.

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. understanding how the law applies to professional practice for social media and complying with legal responsibilities. For example, [Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation](#) (CASL) may affect dietitians if they use electronic channels to promote or market services, organizations, or products. In addition, defamation<sup>8</sup>, copyright, and plagiarism laws also apply to social media and social sharing. Dietitians must consider professional conduct and always provide attributions and links to original sources when sharing information, including content across different platforms (i.e., citing the original source).

## Practice Guidelines for Professionalism and Social Media Conduct

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians should consider clear, professional, and audience-appropriate language when using social media.

For the purposes of this Standard and Practice Guideline, "liking" can be considered communicating a (positive) reaction to and "sharing" can be regarded as "reposting" information or forwarding information to users. Reactions may include emojis that can be interpreted as "positive" and/or "negative". Dietitians should consider the implications of liking, reposting, and reacting to comments, including how they may be interpreted and the possible implications of these actions. For example, abbreviations, acronyms, dietetics and/or health-related terminology, or emojis can be misinterpreted or confusing and hard to understand for the public. Posting short and incomplete sentences can add to this confusion. In addition, not all clients and social media users are aware of online language culture and trends (e.g., short forms for LOL, BRB, etc.). "Using emojis and texting in shorthand can clarify meaning and tone but also lends informality. Dietitians should balance clarity with professionalism. Consider that reacting with an emoji to any post or comment on a post can be easily misconstrued, causing complications and confusion"<sup>5</sup>.

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians are responsible for all information, including comments, posted on any social media account that is their own. Dietitians should take all reasonable steps to comment, remove or edit content posted by others that is within the locus of their own control that may be seen as unprofessional (e.g., insults, inaccurate, misleading, or deceptive information). While dietitians are not responsible for comments outside of the locus of their own control (e.g., unsolicited comments), dietitians should strive to be aware of comments posted about their practice. Unsolicited reviews via public forums, which are developed by members of the public and link to a dietitian's social media platform, are not prohibited. Still, where information is inaccurate, misleading, fraudulent, or defamatory, dietitians should take reasonable steps (e.g., contact the website administrator) to request corrections or deletions.

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians consider how responding to or "liking" a comment/post or image on someone else's profile/page/app may be interpreted as agreeing with or supporting the comments.

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians are encouraged to use appropriate organizational communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace and/or other issues involving regulated health professionals.

**Practice Guideline:** If dietitians are employers, have employees, or manage their private practice, they are encouraged to consider developing their own social media policies and/or

protocols/procedures for their practice. Topics may include the purpose of use, approved platforms, content expectations and guidelines, who can post and comment, guidelines for personal profiles, and consequences of not meeting policy obligations<sup>5</sup>. Dietitians may consider developing strategies on how to respond to clients if contacted through their personal account, including how to decline invitations and preserve the client-RD relationship. Dietitians are encouraged to have a strategy for approaching inappropriate (i.e., excessive or offensive) messages or negative client reviews without breaching client confidentiality. It may be helpful to evaluate the situation, the quality of care provided to the client, and assess any issues the client has described in their review. The dietitian may consider responding directly to the client if they are known, or a general response for the public. Comments should be consistent with principles in this Standard and Guideline and the Code of Ethics.

### **Principle 3 – Evidence-Informed Practice on Social Media**

Employers, clients, and the public rely on a dietitian’s expertise to provide accurate and timely nutrition information.

#### **Standard Statements for Evidence-Informed Practice on Social Media**

**Standard 5:** Dietitians must communicate any food, nutrition, and/or health-related information through social media in an evidence-informed and culturally safe manner.

#### **A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. they avoid posting information that is misleading, deceptive, inappropriate, or harmful. Information must be supported by best available evidence<sup>7</sup> and support equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging, including Indigenous and cultural ways of knowing where relevant.

**Standard 6:** Dietitians must be aware of and transparent about the limits of their knowledge and skill, and not misrepresent their qualifications when sharing content related to food and nutrition<sup>7</sup>.

#### **A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. the [professional misconduct regulation](#) is met which prohibits the inappropriate [use of a term, title or designation](#) in respect of a dietitian's practice. An inappropriate use may include:
  - Modifying the legislated title, and/or using a false or misleading term such as Medical Dietitian when the person is not a physician; or
  - Implying specialization or certification such as Paediatric Dietitian since there are no recognized and certified specialties in dietetics. Dietitians should avoid the use of the word “specialist” in title and in self-description.

- Dietetic Students are reminded that using the title dietitian in Ontario is prohibited under the [Dietetics Act, 1991](#), unless a person is a registrant of the College of Dietitians of Ontario.

### **Practice Guidelines for Evidence-Informed Practice on Social Media**

**Practice Guideline:** When dietitians include links to other information and resources (e.g., websites, videos, podcasts, etc.) in social media posts, dietitians should take reasonable steps to ensure all information is current, accurate and reliable. Dietitians may state that information is valid as of the date of publication; including the date that a post is published<sup>5</sup>.

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians should follow organizational policies and consider what information, if any, requires documentation or archival (e.g., what information provides evidence of actions, events, facts, thought processes, and/or decisions within dietetic practice) in relation to social media and their dietetic practice.

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians can identify their practice area or health condition focus (e.g., public health, diabetes, etc.) on their social media accounts or platforms to assist the public in finding their services. It is also generally acceptable to indicate that a practice is focused to a particular group, such as children. As social media handles and/or hashtags can be considered use of the RD title (e.g., equivalent to an advertisement, or business card), dietitians should describe any focused area of practice after the RD title when using social media to prevent modifying the legislated title or implying specialization. Use of separate hashtags can accomplish this (e.g., #RD #pediatric\_care).

### **Principle 4: Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Privacy on Social Media**

Dietitians have an ethical and legal obligation to maintain client confidentiality and privacy<sup>2</sup> and obtain informed consent from clients when providing services and interacting with clients using social media<sup>5</sup>. In many cases, consent may be implied when clients choose to engage in communication via social media<sup>5</sup>. Dietitians follow the [Professional Practice Standard for the Consent to Treatment and for the Collection, Use and Disclosure of Personal Health Information](#). Dietitians exercise professional judgment to determine when informed consent can be expressed (oral or written) or implied.

Most social networking sites do not provide a secure platform for sharing confidential client information, such as personal health information.



## Standard Statements for Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Privacy on Social Media

**Standard 7:** Dietitians must refrain from seeking client health information online without client consent<sup>7</sup>, unless absolutely necessary for safety concerns. The [Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 \(PHIPA\)](#) does permit indirect collection without consent in limited circumstances (i.e., appropriate rationale related to safety concerns).

### A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:

- i. they follow the [Professional Practice Standard for the Collection, Use and Disclosure of Personal Health Information](#), if collecting, using and disclosing personal health information via social media. Dietitians comply with the legislative requirements in (PHIPA) and the [Health Care Consent Act, 1996](#).

**Standard 8:** If posting content on social media that contains client personal health information (e.g., client case studies or gathering information from other dietitians or health care providers), dietitians de-identify information and/or obtain and document express informed consent from the client or their substitute decision maker (SDM) for disclosure and publication via social media<sup>7</sup>.

### A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:

- i. clients must not be able to identify themselves as the subject of the post. Dietitians must remove any information/circumstances that the personal health information could be used, either alone or with other information to identify the individual. If in doubt that anonymity be maintained (e.g., smaller communities where clients be identified with little information such as location or medical condition), informed consent must be obtained from clients or their SDM and documented.
- ii. if posting a client's identifiable personal health information on social media, dietitians must follow the [Professional Practice Standard – Consent to Treatment and for the Collection, Use and Disclosure of Personal Health Information](#) to ensure knowledgeable consent is obtained and documented, as well as, requirements to obtain express informed consent from clients or their SDM - iii and iv below.
- iii. when obtaining express informed consent from clients or their SDM to collect, use and disclose personal health information on social media, dietitians must show the client the content to be posted on social media, inform them that consent can be withdrawn at any time, inform them of any risks of the content (e.g. once posted it may be challenging to have it completely removed), and provide information such as the purpose, where it will be posted, and any other relevant information used (e.g. client education materials)<sup>7</sup>.

- iv. reasonable steps are taken to mitigate power imbalances inherent in client-RD relationships. Clients may be vulnerable and feel pressured to consent. Dietitians must take reasonable steps to prevent potential effects (e.g., inform clients if they do not consent, it will not affect their care.)

**Standard 9:** If unauthorized use, disclosure, loss or theft of personal health information occurs, dietitians must follow their [obligations for handling privacy breaches](#).

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. compliance with the legislative requirements in *PHIPA*.

### Practice Guidelines for Informed Consent Practice on Social Media

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians should consider and apply privacy settings to determine who can view their posts. It may be helpful to routinely review privacy settings and policies of the platforms used, as they may change. Dietitians should be aware that others can copy, screenshot, and share information without their knowledge or permission.

### Principle 5 - Professional Boundaries and Social Media

Dietitians share food, nutrition and health information related to the dietetic scope of practice for educational or informational purposes. When using their professional designation or providing health-related info, dietitians are acting in a professional capacity.

**Standard 10:** Dietitians must apply their professional judgment and carefully consider risks of providing any client-specific, individualized advice via social media (i.e. the advice provided creates a reasonable perception that a dietitian-client relationship exists).

In the event that client specific individualized advice must be provided over social media, dietitians must be able and willing to meet professional obligations in a client-dietitian relationship as noted in the [Virtual Care Standards and Guidelines](#), including fulfilling privacy obligations as per *PHIPA*. Providing dietetic assessment and/or treatment/intervention via remote technology is considered providing dietetic virtual care. Dietitians are expected to comply with all their existing professional expectations including those set out in relevant legislation, the Code of Ethics, and College Standards.

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. understanding the limits to what can be communicated safely and how social media may make meaningful, client-RD communication more difficult. When interactions with

clients become more complex and individualized, dietitians should consider providing communication options off social media. When general information is being provided, it should be clearly stated that the information posted is not intended to replace individualized dietetic advice<sup>5</sup>.

**Standard 11:** Dietitians must maintain professional boundaries when interacting with clients with whom a client-RD relationship exists, persons associated with these clients, and dietetic learners via social media.

**A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. they must consider the risks of dual relationships (compromised professional judgment and/or unrealistic client expectations) as well as the impact. Dietitians must not exploit power imbalances in the dietitian-client relationship or persons closely associated with them, and any relationship with dietetic learners (mentoring, teaching, supervising, or evaluating student learners)<sup>7</sup>.

**Practice Guidelines for Professional Boundaries and Social Media**

**Practice Guideline:** Maintaining boundaries depends on context. In smaller communities, dietitians may be in the same social media networks as clients, or friends and family. Consider the type and length of care, and vulnerability of the client. The [Boundary Guidelines](#) provide guidance to dietitians when interacting on social media, advising dietitians to be mindful of sharing personal information and considering separating personal and professional communications.

**Principle 6 - Conflict of Interest and Social Media**

Dietitians always use professional judgement to keep clients, colleagues, the public and the professions' obligations a priority<sup>2</sup>. A dietitian is in a conflict of interest when they consider their own (or someone else's) interests ahead of or instead of the interests of their client<sup>9</sup>. Given the casual nature of social media and the opportunities to market and advertise services and products, be aware of behaviours and actions that may lead to conflicts of interest. For more information on conflict of interest, refer to the [Standards and Guidelines for Professional Practice: Conflict of Interest](#).

**Principle 7 – Advertising and Promoting Dietetic Services on Social Media**

Social media provides opportunities for dietitians to promote their dietetic services. A group or an individual dietitian can create sites for various purposes such as describing nutrition services, sharing nutrition education and resources, summarizing recent nutrition research, and

professional opinions. The College encourages professional advertising of dietetic services. When advertising, keep in mind the public's best interest and ensure full disclosure and transparency.

### **Standard Statement for Conflict of Interest, Advertising and Promoting Dietetic Services on Social Media**

**Standard 12:** Dietitians must avoid, or recognize and manage to avoid, an actual or perceived conflict of interest when using social media.

#### **A registered dietitian demonstrates the Standard by ensuring:**

- i. Dietitians must comply with any applicable advertising laws, standards, and guidelines, including the [Standards and Guidelines for Professional Practice – Conflict of Interest](#) when advertising and promoting dietetic services on social media.

### **Practice Guidelines for Conflict of Interest, Advertising and Promoting Dietetic Services on Social Media**

**Practice Guideline:** Dietitians should be aware of potential conflicts of interest that could arise when a dietitian promotes products or services that are unrelated to dietetics through a social media account that identifies them as a dietitian. In addition, dietitians should carefully consider the endorsement of a specific brand or product. Principles of transparency, honesty, evidence-informed practice, professional judgment, and ethics should be considered.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs provide information on how the expectations in the *Social Media Standards and Guidelines* can be met.

### **Can you describe what “professionalism,” and “reputation of the profession” means? How does the College determine this?**

A recent systematic review<sup>10</sup> sought to define professionalism for the dietetics profession for the purpose of teaching nutrition and dietetics. As noted by Dart et al. (2019), professionalism is central to safe and ethical dietetic care and crucial to maintaining trust from the public in healthcare providers. As such, trust is an important part of professionalism. Conduct on social media that undermines the public’s trust and confidence of the profession may impact client access to dietetic care and client care itself.

Generally, College Standards and resources, including the Code of Ethics and other professional resources such as the Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP)<sup>11</sup> inform what is considered professional.

Professionalism is contextual. Concepts of equity, diversity and inclusion are relevant to how professionalism has been defined and conceptualized, historically related to the cultural norms of dominant groups<sup>12</sup>. The College is committed to informed equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDI-B) action to minimize systemic barriers and build a more inclusive and equitable health system for all, including Indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees, people who are racialized, people with disabilities and the 2SLGBTQIA communities.

To evaluate alleged dietitian unprofessional conduct or communication on social media and the impact to professional reputation, the College ensures that the complaints and reports process is fair, consistent, and unbiased. An EDI-B lens is applied to concepts of professionalism, including declaration of bias. Each complaint or report is handled on a case-by-case basis through a neutral, objective fact-finding process. For example, if a complaint arose about a dietitian’s alleged unprofessional conduct on social media, the complaint would be investigated based on the facts and circumstances of the case, including the performance expectations in the Social Media Standard & Guidelines using an evidence-informed approach. In addition, being a professional means practising while considering the following abilities<sup>13</sup>:

- Being reflective and committed to safe, competent, ethical practice
- Practising with integrity, humility, honesty, diligence, respect and treating others fairly and equitably.

- Valuing dignity and worth of all persons regardless of age, race, culture, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, body weight, ableness and/or health status
- Complying with legal requirements and professional obligations
- Applying the principles of sensitive practice and functioning in a client-centred manner
- Working within areas of personal knowledge and skills
- Maintaining a safe work environment
- Maintaining personal wellness consistent with the needs of the practice
- Using an evidence-informed approach to your work
- Acting ethically, respecting autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for justice.

### **What does practising dietetics on social media mean?**

Dietitians should exercise reasonable professional judgement to determine if they are practising dietetics on social media based on the individual circumstances related to their specific role and practice setting. The definition of practising dietetics is quite broad and can include various practice areas and workplace settings.

As noted in the College's definition of practising, dietetic practice can be in a paid or unpaid capacity (e.g., volunteer work) for which registrants use food and nutrition specific knowledge, skills and judgment while engaging in:

- the assessment of nutrition related to health status and conditions for individuals, groups and populations;
- the management and delivery of nutrition therapy to treat disease;
- the management of food services systems; building the capacity of individuals and populations to promote, maintain or restore health and prevent disease through nutrition and related means; and
- the management, education or leadership that contributes to the enhancement and quality of dietetic and health services.

### **For greater clarity, dietetic practice includes the following activities:**

- Assessing, promoting, protecting, and enhancing health and the prevention of nutrition-related diseases in populations using population health and health promotion approaches, as well as strategies focusing on the interactions among the determinants of health, food security and overall health.
- Conducting dietetic, health and evaluation research, product development, product marketing, and consumer education to develop, promote and market food and nutritional products and pharmaceuticals related to nutrition disorders or nutritional health.

- Developing or advocating for food and nutrition policy.
- Communicating food & nutrition information in any print, radio, television, video, Internet, or multi-media format

**NB: This is an excerpt of the Definition of Practising Dietetics. Please see [link](#) for full details.**

**Can you describe what is meant by cultural safety and cultural humility via social media use?**

Dietitians can support equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging through social media use by committing to practicing in a manner that promotes cultural humility and cultural safety.

Although definitions may vary in the literature, for the purposes of this document, practicing cultural humility involves self-reflection, curiosity and adopting a learner’s mindset to understanding the experiences of another person<sup>12,13</sup>. Cultural humility includes empathy and respect, practicing in a client-centred manner and being open to the experiences, preferences and worldviews of clients and colleagues. It also means being aware of one’s position and privilege<sup>13</sup>.

Culturally safe care as noted in the ICDEP<sup>11</sup> is an outcome based on respectful engagement when power imbalances are recognized and addressed in the provision of dietetic care. Free of racism and other discrimination, clients, colleagues, and students should feel safe receiving and/or working with and accessing care from dietitians and dietitians should be safe and respected providing care<sup>12, 13</sup>.

Dietitians should be aware that conduct on social media (which may include liking, sharing, and/or commenting on content) and unprofessional comments and/or behaviour can impact safety and trust for clients and the public, potentially impacting willingness to access care, and/or create harm.

**How might dietitians approach potential or actual clients who are contacting a dietitian inappropriately (repeatedly or offensively) on social media?**

Dietitians may consider developing their own code of conduct and/or social media policy and/or protocols/procedures for their practice<sup>5</sup>. Standard 3, i., may help guide expectations. Dietitians may develop a strategy for how to respond to a client/potential client and what steps may occur based on the communication or behaviour (i.e., notification, blocking, etc.). The code of conduct or policy, protocol or procedure may include how to deal with public relations issues and how negative comments will be responded to<sup>5</sup>.

## **Appendix II**

### **Draft Social Media Practice Scenarios**

Please review the Draft Social Media Standard and Practice Guidelines prior to reviewing the Draft Social Media Practice Scenarios.

There are no simple answers to these scenarios.

The scenarios provide accompanying guiding questions, applying the principles from the Standard and Guidelines. This provides an example of how dietitians can apply the Standards and Guidelines personally and professionally in relation to social media use.

#### **Scenario 1: Tik Tok Trouble**

Together with colleagues, some dietitians have used Tik Tok at their local hospital to post collaborative team dances of healthcare providers in their uniforms during the pandemic. However, one dietitian has created their own videos using the tag name “Dietitian Dilemmas.” The dietitian has been complaining about a staff member on TikTok video reels and has frequently complained that the staff member is “ignorant” and that they do not have a good relationship with them. There are also posts about clients who are “difficult,” albeit anonymously. The dietitian has also commented negatively about their employer on TikTok video reels.

Considering the principle of professionalism and social media conduct and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Is the dietitian practicing dietetics?
2. Is this a professional account? If so, is the dietitian identifiable (via name and designation)? For example, even if using a separate tag name, does the dietitian’s professional designation and same name that appear somewhere on their profile?
3. How can this dietitian’s social media presence impact the public’s perception of the dietitian and the profession, including diminishing the dietitian’s credibility and the public’s trust and confidence in the profession?
4. Could any content/comments be perceived as offensive, discriminatory, or disrespectful? Is the post true? Is it kind? Is it helpful?
5. Has the dietitian used appropriate organizational/communication channels to discuss, report and resolve workplace or other professional issues?
6. While disagreements or conflict can arise in professional practice, is the dietitian acting respectfully towards her colleagues and clients?



**Scenario 2: Tricky Tweets**

A dietitian uses their name and designation on Twitter and provides advice on all sorts of topics (often not dietetic related). One post covers the topic of essential oils for healing, the next about antioxidants to boost immunity and “prevent infections.” Tags include “Immunologist RD.” Links to other materials provided appear inaccurate and unreliable.

Consider the principles of evidence-informed practice and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Is the information shared evidence-informed (i.e., accurate, current, appropriate) and not misleading, deceptive, inappropriate, or harmful?
2. What are the limits of the dietitian’s knowledge and skill?
3. Does the dietitian misrepresent their qualifications when sharing content related to food and nutrition?
4. Is there an inappropriate use of a term, title or designation in respect of a dietitian's practice (i.e. using a term or implying specialization or certification)?
5. Are links to other information and resources in posts current, accurate and reliable?

**Scenario 3: Oversharing on FB?**

A dietitian shares a client case through a private Facebook group open only to other dietitians and dietetic students. The case is complex, and the dietitian appreciates gathering insights on the client’s clinical management from other dietitians. Through several posts, the dietitian provides details, including the personal health information of the client (e.g., medical diagnosis, age, lab results, health history and occupation). However, they do not share any demographic info, nor the client’s name. The dietitian practices in a small community and in a less common area of dietetic practice. A dietetic student in the group recognizes the content and believes the case is about their aunt.

Consider the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Has the dietitian de-identified information and/or obtained client express informed consent for disclosure and publication via social media?
2. If obtaining express informed consent from clients or their substitute decision-maker (SDM) to collect, use and disclose personal health information on social media, has the dietitian showed the client the content to be posted on social media, including informing the client that consent can be withdrawn at any time? Have any risks of the content and information such as the purpose, where it will be posted, any other relevant information used be provided?
3. Although the content and comments are made in a “private/closed” group, do the posts have the potential to be public and accessible to all?

**Scenario 4: Negative Reviews**

A client posts a negative review of a dietitian's service via an online review website and writes comments about the dietitian, some of which are untrue. The dietitian is upset and feels somewhat vulnerable. The dietitian is ready to type up their post, then pauses and reflects.

Consider the principles of the Social Media Standard and Practice Guidelines and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Has the dietitian evaluated the situation? Consider the quality of the care provided to the client and assess any issues the client describes in the review.
2. Is there any content posted by the client that may be insulting, inaccurate or misleading?
3. Would contacting legal counsel for advice be warranted in this situation?
4. Can the dietitian contact the website to request a correction or deletion?
5. Would responding to the post be helpful? If so, dietitians should avoid responding in haste or anger. If posting a response, does the response ensure confidentiality (i.e., responding either directly to the client if they are known, or by providing a general response for public viewing, carefully considering what should be included (e.g., what care you strive to provide, how you deal with client concerns generally, etc.)?
6. Are the dietitian's comments consistent with the Code of Ethics and with the Standards of Practice?
7. In what ways can the dietitian's entire professional profile help to build a positive online presence?
8. In what ways, if any, can the client's experience be improved? How does the dietitian foster client feedback and act on suggestions?

**Scenario 5: "Liking" the wrong post?**

A dietitian who is passionate about plant-based diets and animal rights gets into a highly debated online discussion with a PhD who cites research about animal foods. One participant in the thread makes a defamatory comment towards the professor. The dietitian "likes" the post.

Consider the principles of the Social Media Standard and Practice Guidelines and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Is the dietitian practicing dietetics?
2. Is this a professional account? If so, is the dietitian identifiable (via name and designation)? For example, even if using a separate tag name, does the dietitian's professional designation and same name that appear somewhere on their profile?
3. If using a professional account, could a "like," "follow," "thumbs-up" or reaction be perceived as an endorsement of the post?

4. If this is not a professional account, could this conduct sufficiently have a negative impact on the profession and the public's interest?
5. How can this dietitian's social media presence impact the public's perception of the dietitian and the profession, including diminishing the dietitian's credibility and the public's trust and confidence in the profession?
6. Could any content be perceived as offensive, discriminatory, or disrespectful?
7. Is the dietitian acting respectfully?

### **Scenario 5: Hanging out on Messenger**

A dietitian is supervising practicum students and sends posts on Facebook Messenger and Instagram Direct Message.

Consider the principles of professional boundaries and apply the following guiding questions:

1. Is this a professional or personal account?
2. Is professional language used?
3. Has the preceptor maintained professional boundaries (consideration of power imbalances in the dietitian-student relationship)?
4. When interacting with clients/students, is the dietitian using electronic communication and social media to enhance the student's learning or for personal reasons?

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