

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

SOCIAL MEDIA

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The advent of social media opens up new means of communication for optometrists. Social media is always evolving and has become one of the many means of communicating with patients and the public.

The nature of social media presents some risks for optometrists and patients. To minimize risks, when optometrists engage in the use of social media and technology platforms of any type they are expected to adhere to all of their existing professional responsibilities, including those set out in the legislation, bylaws, code of ethics and College policies of the Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists (SAO). The SAO recognizes that if an optometrist adheres to relevant professional expectations when using social media, these platforms can present opportunities to enhance education, professional competency and can also be an important source of information and entertainment.

Optometrists should keep in mind the principles of good optometric practice, which are also relevant to the use of social media including being in good taste, dignified and consistent with the ethical practice of optometry.

Marketing and promotional material should be clear, accurate, truthful, complete and not misleading. Optometrists have the following responsibilities when using social media:

1. Safeguard patient privacy, confidentiality and trust by protecting patient information
2. Maintain appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and their patients
3. Maintain professional and collegial relationships with colleagues, other professionals, and members of the public
4. Members shall not claim superiority including equipment, examination skills or technics, materials, products or expected results.
5. Collaborate with other health care professionals (information exchange etc.); and avoid conflicts of interest

In order to satisfy professional expectations while using social media, optometrists are advised to:

1. Assume all content on the internet (anonymous or not) is public and accessible to everyone
2. Remember social media platforms are constantly evolving
3. Refrain from posting identifying information about patients in any context
4. Refrain from invading the privacy of patients by seeking information about them online
5. Abide by statutes and regulations related to defamation, copyright and plagiarism when posting content online
6. Optometrists may not publish, seek out, or ask for testimonials or endorsement.
7. Apply the strictest privacy settings to protect patient information and information about patients that could be posted by others
8. Be mindful of a public and patient presence online and be proactive in controlling and avoiding content which may be viewed as personal or unprofessional
9. There are situations in which it is appropriate for optometrists to provide health related information that is not patient specific
10. Information should be vetted carefully to ensure scientific accuracy of information published as fact
11. Information should reflect best clinical practice. Examples of such information may include frequency of eye examinations recommendations, the importance of UV protection, etc.
12. Always proactively consider how other professional expectations apply to the use of social media