# Text Description automatically generated with medium confidence

# Social Media Scenarios: Supporting Education

These scenarios and their content are for educational purposes only.

While the College does not make any representation of real cases, the scenarios presented below draw on cases that were considered by a committee. The responses provided are based on relevant College Standards, legislation and case law, which are used by committees when considering a physiotherapist’s practice or conduct. Be sure to check out the resources linked at the bottom of each scenario.

If you have any questions, contact the Practice Advisor at 1-800-583-5885 ext. 241 or [advice@collegept.org](mailto:advice@collegept.org).

**Would you do this IRL (In Real Life)?**

Physiotherapists are expected to:

* Communicate online with the same level of professionalism, honesty, integrity, and respect as face-to-face interactions.
* Maintain professional boundaries.
* Maintain patient privacy and confidentiality.

**Think Before You Post**

Physiotherapists are expected to use professional judgement and maintain their professionalism when communicating online. A PT should also recognize the permanence of posting information online. Nothing posted online is truly private… it is “for everyone, forever.”

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## Scenario 1: Comments About Another Physiotherapist

A physiotherapist posted negative comments online using offensive language about another PT practicing in the area.

***Response:*** As regulated health professionals, physiotherapists are responsible for conducting themselves ethically in every professional practice situation. PTs must act with integrity and demonstrate respect – this includes posting in an online forum. In this scenario, the forum is not known, but could be seen by the public. It may be perceived that the PT is not showing respect for another member of the profession. This may undermine the public’s trust in the profession. As a result, patients may not seek needed care from the profession.

* [Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada](https://www.collegept.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/essentialcompetencyprofile2009.pdf?sfvrsn=614fc9a1_2)
* [Code of Ethics](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/ethics)
* [Professional Misconduct Regulation](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_080388_e.htm)

## Scenario 2: A Position of Trust

The College received a concern from a member of the public about social media posts by a physiotherapist. In the posts, the physiotherapist identified themselves as a PT with experience treating patients with viral and respiratory illnesses. The PT posted a handful of comments questioning the validity of vaccines.

The PT noted that they were trying to engage in respectful, open conversation with members of the community. However, the physiotherapist acknowledged that their professional identity and their personal opinion may be perceived as intertwined, so they removed the posts.

***Response:*** As regulated healthcare professionals, physiotherapists need to comply with the regulatory standards, the College’s Code of Ethics and public health guidance. Any material posted by those who represent themselves as a PT is likely to be seen as trustworthy and may be taken to represent the views of the profession more widely.

Physiotherapists hold a unique position of trust with the public and have a professional responsibility to not make comments or provide information that encourages the public to ignore public health guidance. The information physiotherapists share must not be misleading or deceptive and must be supported by scientific evidence.

* [Code Of Ethics](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/ethics)
* [Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada](https://www.collegept.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/essentialcompetencyprofile2009.pdf?sfvrsn=614fc9a1_2) (Domain 7: Professionalism)
* [When Posting Becomes Unprofessional](https://www.collegept.org/(S(ezuff0vl2wsqu055ek2msbr5))/case-of-the-month/post/case-of-the-month/2021/06/15/when-posting-becomes-unprofessional) (Case of the Month)

## Scenario 3: Posting a Photo without Permission

A physiotherapist used their personal cell phone to take a picture of a patient receiving acupuncture to their shoulder without the patient's consent. The patient is partially dressed and their face is blurred.

***Response:*** The physiotherapist did not get the patient’s informed consent to take a photo using the PT’s personal cell phone. Blurring a patient's face may not be sufficient to deidentify them. Using personal cell phone to take pictures of patients presents a significant risk to the patient's confidentiality. The PT is accountable for the security of the (photo) information. Cell phones are vulnerable to security concerns and may not have adequate protection though encryption, firewalls, and antivirus software. Cell phones may also be stolen, allowing unauthorized access to the information. PTs must not transmit or place online identifiable patient information without informed consent from the patient.

* [Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/04p03)
* [Code Of Ethics](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/ethics)
* [Consent](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/consent)
* [Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada](https://www.collegept.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/essentialcompetencyprofile2009.pdf?sfvrsn=614fc9a1_2) (Domain 7: Professionalism)

## Scenario 4: A Detailed Blog Post

As a physiotherapist, you regularly contribute to a blog in the local newspaper. In one of the blog posts, you refer to caring for a patient who fell on the ice and suffered a fracture. You share that the patient is a well-known philanthropist, who successfully resumed their extensive community involvement with the help of physiotherapy care. Although you did not post the patient's name, the patient is furious that their personal information was made public without their consent.

***Response:*** PTs must not transmit or place online identifiable patient information without informed consent from the patient. Never share information about patients without first having a conversation with them about the risks and potential pitfalls of sharing personal health information and potentially having the patient be identified publicly. Be sure to document a description of the conversation you had with the patient.

Leaving out details when you post information or images may not protect the patient's confidentiality. Others can copy and share posted information without the PT’s knowledge or permission.

* [Privacy](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/privacy)
* [Consent](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/consent)
* [Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-boundaries-and-sexual-abuse)
* [Professional Misconduct Regulation](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_080388_e.htm)

## Scenario 5: Facebook Friend Request

You receive a friend request on your personal Facebook account from someone whose name sounds familiar. You accept the request. After looking through their posts, you realize that it belongs to one of your former patients who is on your waitlist. The patient sends you a Facebook message commenting on your vacation pictures and how much fun you seemed to have in Mexico.

***Response:*** The patient now has access to personal information about you and your privacy is compromised. The professional boundary between the physiotherapist and the patient may now be unclear. You may face greater challenges maintaining the professional relationship now that the patient has access to your personal social media posts.

Physiotherapists are advised to have two separate accounts on any social media platform, one for their professional life and a separate one for personal contacts. This is an important step towards maintaining a healthy therapeutic boundary.

* [Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-boundaries-and-sexual-abuse)
* [Where is the Line? Professional Boundaries in a Therapeutic Relationship.](https://cptbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CPTBC-wheres-the-line-2019.pdf)

## Scenario 6: Negative Online Reviews

A physiotherapist saw a negative review about their clinic on a third-party review site. The PT was sure they recognized the patient from the description they posted. The physiotherapist recalled that the patient had a good recovery and appeared pleased with their care. The PT decided to post a response to the review. The physiotherapist wrote that they were surprised by the review because the patient had returned to playing professional soccer only eight weeks after injury.

***Response:*** How physiotherapists choose to respond to reviews and ratings may be of concern to the College. Revealing something about a patient’s injury, treatment, or status may create a breach of the patient’s privacy and confidentiality. In the case of a negative review, you may want to thank the reviewer for their input and direct them to call you or the clinic to discuss the situation further. This will allow you to come to a resolution privately, rather than airing it all out in public.

On the other hand, responding to a positive review with a sincere thank you and even including an emoji indicating your appreciation might be completely fine.

* [Code Of Ethics](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/ethics)
* [Privacy](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/privacy)
* [Consent](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/consent)
* [Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-boundaries-and-sexual-abuse)
* [PHIPHA Frequently Asked Questions: Information and Privacy Commissioner](https://www.ipc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/phipa-faq.pdf)

## Scenario 7: Inappropriate Images

A physiotherapist sent images of a child that were of a sexual nature to many random individuals using their personal text. A recipient of the images sent concerns about the PT’s behavior to the College and to the police who subsequently laid criminal charges.

***Response:*** Even when physiotherapists are posting in a private capacity, the post may be subject to regulatory action if there is a negative impact on the profession or the public. The PT was not acting as a physiotherapist in this scenario, but the College may still investigate when there is a risk identified to the public.

* [Professional Misconduct Regulation](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_080388_e.htm)
* [Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-boundaries-and-sexual-abuse)

## Scenario 8: An Up-and-Coming Athlete

A young athlete is featured in a physiotherapist’s Instagram post about a hip injury, but the patient did not provide consent. The post includes a description of the hip injury, anatomical drawings describing the muscles, and the patient talking about how this hip has been bothering them for a long time. The PT tagged the athlete in the post. Later that year, the young athlete lost out on an opportunity for an athletic scholarship to an American college because the recruiter searched the patient’s name on social media, saw the post from the physiotherapy clinic, and was worried about the hip injury. The patient found out and was upset that the post had remained on the clinic’s Instagram account.

***Response:*** A physiotherapist who posts using patient health information is responsible for first communicating with a patient about the potential risks of sharing their personal health information online and getting the patient’s consent. The information posted and shared online may be considered permanent, as it is beyond a PT’s control to delete it once posted publicly. Others can take screenshots or even copy whole video clips from someone else’s social media accounts.

Posting about a patient's treatment and recovery may primarily benefit the physiotherapist as a professional, not the patient. A physiotherapist should avoid incentivizing a patient to participate in a social media campaign to promote the PT’s business by offering complimentary treatments or discounts for items at the clinic.

* [Consent](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/consent)
* [Privacy](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/privacy)
* [Conflict of Interest Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-conflict-of-interest)
* [Professional Misconduct Regulation](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_080388_e.htm)
* [PHIPHA Frequently Asked Questions: Information and Privacy Commissioner](https://www.ipc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/phipa-faq.pdf)

## Scenario 9: Texting with Patients

A physiotherapist used text messages to confirm patient appointment times and check up on patients to motivate them to do their home exercises. The PT sent a text to a patient related to their Home Exercise Program (HEP), but the patient was not near their phone. The patient’s co-worker read the text and asked why the patient was attending physiotherapy. The patient had not agreed to have this health information communicated by text and complained to the College and to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario IPC (Information and Privacy Commissioner).

***Response:*** Texting may be an effective way to communicate quickly and directly with patients, but it comes with risks. Before texting with a patient about their care, physiotherapists must discuss with the patient what kind of information can be shared and how to safeguard private health information through encrypted messages or two-step messaging, for example. Before communicating with patients, physiotherapists should understand how patients would like to be contacted, and with what information. Physiotherapists may also consider the timing of when text messages are sent – early morning or late-night texts may be interpreted by patients as potential boundary violations.

* [Consent](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/consent)
* [Privacy](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/privacy)
* [Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Standard](https://www.collegept.org/rules-and-resources/new-boundaries-and-sexual-abuse)
* [Where is the Line? Professional Boundaries in a Therapeutic Relationship](https://cptbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CPTBC-wheres-the-line-2019.pdf)
* [Information and Privacy Commissioner Health Fact Sheet](https://www.ipc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Health-Fact-Sheet-Communicating-PHI-by-Email-FINAL.pdf)