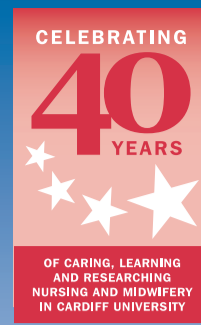


Social Networking

Principles of Good Practice for Nursing and Midwifery Students



Once you embark on your undergraduate nursing or midwifery programme it is vitally important that you understand from the outset that protection of the public, maintenance of professional behaviour, and the reputation of the University and profession are all of paramount importance.

There are a number of University procedures, which can be accessed from the links provided on this page, which will provide information about how the University seeks to guard against members of the public/patients care being compromised. One of these procedures, the Fitness to Practise Procedure details what behaviour/s are unacceptable and could be investigated if reported to the University. This list of criteria also applies to behaviours which could be offensive to colleagues or fellow students.

In terms of inappropriate professional behaviour one area which students need to have an awareness of is the safe and appropriate use of internet social networking sites.

Social networking has emerged over the last several years and has become one of the most common forms of communication between a wide variety of individuals, groups, public, private and professional organisations. There are clearly some benefits to this type of communication if used appropriately, whilst understanding the need for establishing privacy settings. However, there are potential dangers if mechanisms such as these are not understood or if the user places inappropriate or confidential information, including visual images on a site where that information can be shared amongst a wider audience. This can be particularly damaging with reference to professional practice, where there is potential for confidential and sensitive information to be shared inappropriately. In a small number of cases these sites are also used to intimidate or bully other colleagues or fellow students.

The SONMS currently has a number of mechanisms in place to inform and educate students about the appropriate use of such sites. The SONMS will not tolerate inappropriate use of social networking sites and these matters are taken very seriously. In the event of evidence being received by the School in relation to any issue relating to Fitness to Practise, including the inappropriate use of social networking sites, the matter is investigated immediately and the University procedure instigated.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council have produced guidance on the use of social networking for students and state:

“The standard of your conduct as a student, nurse or midwife, both online and offline, is important. The way you act online can jeopardise your ability to join and stay on our register. Make sure you read and understand the code, our guidance for students, this advice on social networking sites and other information that we produce. You should think through what this information means for you in practice, and if needed, take steps to change the way you use social networking sites.

- Keep your personal and professional life separate as far as possible. For example, you could keep **Facebook** just for close friends and family, use **Twitter** for sharing information with people you may not know, and use **LinkedIn** for building and maintaining professional relationships.
- If you identify yourself as a nurse or midwife on Facebook, you should act responsibly at all times and uphold the reputation of your profession. Even if you do not identify yourself as a nurse or midwife, be aware that your conduct online could still jeopardise your registration if it calls your fitness to practise into question.
- Protect your own privacy. Think through what kinds of information you want to share and with whom, and adjust your privacy settings. On Facebook, you can adjust your privacy settings at group level to share different levels of information with different kinds of friends. Remember that the more your personal life is exposed through social networking sites, the more likely it is that this could have a negative impact.
- Do not use social networks to build or pursue relationships with patients and service users, even if they are no longer in your care. If you receive a friendship request from a current or former patient, Facebook allows you to ignore this request without the person being informed, avoiding the need to give unnecessary offence.
- Do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about patients or complaints about colleagues. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate.
- Never post pictures of patients or service users, even if they ask you to do this. Our guidance on record keeping states clearly, “you should not take or keep photographs of any person, or their family, that are not clinically relevant” (NMC 2009b). If your mobile phone has a camera, you should not use it in the workplace.
- Social networking sites should not be used for raising and escalating concerns (commonly referred to as whistleblowing). Our guidance on raising and escalating concerns (NMC 2010) sets out your professional duty to report any concerns which put the safety of people in your care or the public at risk, and the steps you should take to do this.
- Remember that everything you post online is public, even with the strictest privacy settings. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed, and it is easy to lose control of it. Presume that everything you post online will be permanent and will be shared.

- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. You can remove someone from your friend list and block them from interacting with you, and most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others. If you are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concern, including if necessary with their university or employer. In the most serious circumstances, for example if someone's use of a social networking site is unlawful, you should also report the incident to the police.

Source: NMC Website 2011

In terms of further information the following links may be useful:

SOMNS Lead for Student Conduct

Senior Lecturer and Professional Lead for Student Conduct.
Email: Daviesjp3@cf.ac.uk Tel 02920917777

The Nursing and Midwifery Council advice centre

advice@nmc-uk.org

Cardiff University Student Support

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/studentsupport/>

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/for/prospective/inter/study/lifeatcardiff/studentsunion/index.html>

Cardiff University Procedures

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/student/index.html>

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/regis/sfs/regis/1011acadregs/academic-regulations-handbook-201011.html>

Nursing and Midwifery Council Guidance on professional conduct for nursing and midwifery students.

<http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/Guidance/Guidance-on-professional-conduct-for-nursing-and-midwifery-students-September-2010.PDF>

Frequently asked questions

- Q** I am worried that someone is placing inappropriate information on Facebook which relates to a patient. What should I do?
- A** As soon as it is possible contact your personal tutor in the first instance who will be able to refer your concerns immediately.
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- Q** I have seen students having a conversation on Facebook which is about a fellow student. The comments are both derogatory and possibly discriminatory. I don't know if I should speak to them about it?
- A** First and foremost do not get involved in the conversation and do not discuss the matter with them but again seek help from your personal tutor.
- In both of these situations you may want to print the information as confirmation of the statements/ conversation you have seen.
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- Q** I am worried that there might be repercussions if I report an incident and that I will have to give evidence.
- A** You have taken the correct action and will be supported by the appropriate staff in the school.
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- Q** I have seen a picture of a student on facebook with one of their patients.
- A** Act in exactly the same way as above. This would also apply if in your view the image was inappropriate e.g. a sexually explicit image.
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- Q** I have been asked to become 'friends' on a social networking site by my mentor/patient/placement staff, is this ok?
- A** It is best to limit your page to just close family and friends as stated in the NMC guidance.
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- Q** I noticed my personal tutor/university member of staff is a member of the same social networking site as myself – can I ask them to be my 'friend'?
- A** No this would not be advisable as they would not normally be a close relative or friend. The relationship in this context is a professional one.