



# PRACTICE ADVICE

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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### PRACTICING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Technology enables us to do things more quickly and in different ways than we have ever been capable of doing in the past – emailing a patient/client to set up an appointment, sending a quick text to your teenager to let him/her know you are on your way home, submitting your CASLPO registration renewal online, or keeping in touch with friends and relatives via Facebook™ or Skype™.

In addition to the impact of social media on our personal lives, technology has touched our professional world with advances in electronic charting and initiatives such as CASLPO's online Self-Assessment Tool and the public register. Unfortunately, many people overlook the potential impact that your personal use of technology can have on your professional lives. In addition to the obvious privacy risks associated storing confidential patient/client information on your computer (see CASLPO Today articles in May and August, 2010), there are other considerations when using social media that you should be mindful of, for example:

- Is it appropriate to accept a friend request from a patient/client who contacts you on Facebook™?
- Do you follow the same advertising guidelines when using Facebook™, LinkedIn™ or your website, as you would if publishing an ad in the Yellowpages™?
- Is it appropriate to use the computer to access the Internet for personal use during work hours? Do you know your employer's policy on this?

- Have you ever discussed a patient/client when emailing, messaging or Skyping™?

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I read in the paper that a woman lost her job because she posted online that she was going to a celebration that night and, expecting to be out late, planned to call in “sick” to work the next day, which she did. Can my employer really fire me for that?

Employers can set policies that allow them to take disciplinary action for misconduct, insubordination, absenteeism, or other reasons typically outlined in employment agreements. What is key to this dismissal is that the individual who was fired failed to recognize that anything posted online - a comment or a picture, on a blog or any social network - can essentially be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. In this age of instantaneous information, even people who are not your “friends” can quickly be notified of something you have said or done online.

Before adding that picture or tweeting that line, ask yourself if you have ever negatively judged someone as a result of something you have read or seen online, and would you say or do what you are about to post, in front of your employer or a patient/client?

Q: I work in a pre-school speech and language program and have enjoyed many great conversations with the mother of one of my patients; we have a good rapport. Recently when I logged into my Facebook™ account I saw that I had a “friend request” from this person. I don’t want to insult her by not accepting the request, but I’m not sure if I am allowed to do this. Can you tell me what CASLPO’s position on this is?

Technology can blur the lines of distinction between personal and professional relationships. Regardless of the medium, while you are treating this woman’s child you have a responsibility to maintain a therapeutic boundary See [Position Statement on Professional Relationships and Boundaries](#). As the professional you have inherently more power in the relationship than the patient/client or his/her parent because of your knowledge and authority to determine treatment for the patient/client.

As the professional it is also up to you to explain to the patient’s mother that you cannot have a personal relationship while treating her child as it puts you in a conflict of interest. According to section 4 of the [Conflict of Interest Regulation](#), “it is a conflict of interest for a member to participate in any professional activity where the member’s personal or financial considerations compromise or may compromise the member’s judgment in that professional activity, or where such involvement may appear to provide the potential for the member’s professional judgment to be compromised.” Or more simply put, your personal relationship with the patient’s mother may result in the patient receiving preferential treatment or it may appear this way to others who would see you listed as her “Facebook™ friend”.

Q: I recently contacted CASLPO because I started seeing patients privately and wanted to know what I had to do to register my practice. I was told that I need to provide a business

address and phone number, in addition to verifying that I have liability insurance. I will not be seeing patients in my home and am not comfortable having my residential address listed on CASLPO's website under the Public Register because someone could easily find me using Mapquest™. What can I do?

There are many online mapping tools such as Mapquest™ and Google Maps™ that enable people to easily locate one another. CASLPO is required under the Regulated Health Professions Act to develop and maintain an online list of all members outlining, in part, their business address(es) and business phone number(s). CASLPO recognizes that the professions of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology are predominantly female-based and that your safety is of primary importance. For this reason, CASLPO will allow you to obtain a post-office box to be used as your business address. In addition to making use of this option, CASLPO recommends that you do not list your home address or phone numbers on Facebook™, MySpace™, LinkedIn™ or any other online forum.

**Q: Can I advertise on Facebook™? What about having a profile on LinkedIn™?**

There are no restrictions on the type of medium used to advertise your practice. However, regardless of the format or technology, you are responsible for adhering to CASLPO's proposed [Advertising Regulation](#) which states:

Ss. 2(1) An advertisement with respect to a member's practice must not contain:

- a) anything that is false or misleading;
- b) anything that, because of its nature, cannot be verified;
- c) a reference to specialization in any area of practice or in any procedure or treatment unless the member holds a specialist certificate issued by the College, although nothing herein shall prohibit an advertisement that contains a reference to the member's scope of practice, or statement that the member has additional training in a particular area of practice, or a statement that the member's practice is restricted to a particular area of practice;
- d) an endorsement by an organization that does not have expertise relevant to the subject matter of the endorsement;
- e) a testimonial by a patient or client or former patient or client or by a friend or relative of a patient or client; or former patient or client;
- f) a reference to a drug or to a particular brand of equipment used to provide services; or
- g) anything that is distasteful, undignified, unethical or unprofessional.