

Social Media Policy

1. The Podiatrists Board of New Zealand (the Board) is a statutory authority appointed under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA), responsible for the regulation and oversight of the podiatry profession in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The principal purpose of the HPCAA is to protect the health and safety of members of the public by providing mechanisms to ensure that health practitioners are competent and fit to practise their professions.

2. The use of social media has expanded rapidly, by way of social media networking, personal websites, discussion forums, message boards, and blogs. This policy was developed to help practitioners registered with the Board to understand their responsibilities and obligations under the HPCAA and other legislation when communicating on social media.
3. Definition of social media – “Social media describes the online and mobile tools that people use to share opinions, information, experiences, images, and video or audio clips and includes websites and all applications used for social networking.”
4. Whether an online activity is able to be viewed by the public or is limited to a specific group of people, health practitioners need to maintain professional standards when they use social media. Professional and ethical standards are set out in the Board’s Ethical Codes and Standards of Conduct, as well as the Principles and Standards for the Practice of Podiatry in Aotearoa New Zealand (PSPPANZ).
5. In the context of social media usage, health practitioners should also be mindful of all legislation affecting professional practice, including, but not limited to:

Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003

Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994

The HDC Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights 1996

Health Information Privacy Code 2020

Privacy Act 2020

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

6. Health practitioners should only post information on social media that is not in breach of legal, ethical, and professional obligations, by:

Complying with professional obligations.

Complying with confidentiality and privacy obligations (such as by not discussing patients or posting pictures of procedures, case studies, patients, or sensitive material which may enable people to be identified without having obtained consent).

Presenting information in an unbiased, evidence-based context.

Not viewing, downloading, or posting pornographic, obscene, or discriminatory material.

Not making unsubstantiated claims.

7. The Board's Ethical Codes and Standards of Conduct contains guidance about the required standards of professional behaviour, which apply to health practitioners whether they are interfacing in person or online, particularly in relation to privacy and confidentiality of patient information, and also acceptable standards of personal behaviour.
8. A breach of this policy is a matter for which a health practitioner can be disciplined under the HPCAA.
9. Practitioners are increasingly participating in online social media, and this may be perceived as a form of advertising.

Practitioners need to be aware that information circulated on social media may end up in the public domain, and remain there, irrespective of the intent at the time of posting. This form of media does have the potential of risk for practitioners.

Practitioners must be aware of the need to maintain patient confidentiality, the potential for allegations of defamation and the need to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

Practitioners must:

Routinely monitor their own social media presence to ensure that the personal and professional information is accurate and appropriate.

Maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient practitioner relationship when interacting with people online and ensure patient privacy and confidentiality is maintained.

Consider separating personal and professional content online.

Recognise that actions online and content posted can negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues and may even have consequences for their careers.

Ensure no online testimonials are posted on their social media sites, nor patient reviews actively linked to their websites. (See the Podiatrists Board's Advertising Policy for more detailed information on patient testimonial restrictions).

Obtain patient approval in writing for the use of any personal images or images related to their patients on their social media sites.

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