



Guide to Using Social Media and Other Means of Electronic Communication in Practice

Introduction:

Electronic communication and social media can be effective means of communication when used appropriately. They serve a range of purposes that include communicating directly with established patients, communicating with potential new patients and educating the public. These means of communication must be used cautiously and professionally. Registered Denturists must be aware of the numerous risks associated with the use of electronic communication and social media in their practice.

While using electronic means of communication or social media in practice can be useful, inappropriate use of electronic communication and/or social media can result in the Registered Denturist facing professional, civil or criminal consequences. Examples of negative outcomes associated with the use of social media or electronic communications in practice include:

- Making inappropriate comments that lead to civil action, such as defamation;
- Disclosing confidential information about patients and/or colleagues, breaching privacy policies and legislation;
- Breaching a court-ordered publication ban;
- Inciting hatred from identifiable groups;
- Using technology to harass a patient, colleague or others, contrary to the Criminal Code (Canada); and/or
- Exchanging or forwarding unauthorized photos, videos, or audio recordings of patient cases leading to charges of violation of privacy.

Guidelines:

Registered Denturists should:

1. Provide patients with information regarding the risks and benefits of communicating electronically, ask them to acknowledge their consent by signing an electronic communication agreement.
2. Develop a policy or protocol regarding electronic communication with patients which may include:
 - Subjects that are appropriate for electronic communication as opposed to in-person visits;
 - The response time for electronic messages; and
 - Measures that are taken to ensure security of patient information (i.e. password protection, encryption).
3. Avoid exchanging text messages, private/personal phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with patients. If patient health information is sent to a mobile

electronic device (i.e. laptop, cellphone, tablet), the Registered Denturist should be able to confirm the security and confidentiality of the information being transmitted.

4. Actively manage the privacy and security settings on social media accounts and assume that information that is posted can be accessed and/or altered.
5. Ask others, in writing, to remove any undesirable content that is related to the Registered Denturist. Similarly, a Registered Denturists may request that they not be tagged in a photograph or post without expressed permission.
6. Only use electronic communication and social media to enhance patient care, not to satisfy personal needs. Ensure that expressed written consent is received from patients before posting photographs or videos on social media, or using them for educational purposes.

Practice Scenario

A Registered Denturist provided their cell phone number to patients in the event of an emergency. One patient recently received immediate dentures and is having some issues. Instead of making an appointment, the patient takes a picture of the sore spot in their mouth and sends this via text message to the Registered Denturist. At home, the Registered Denturist's teenage son receives the text message via their tablet, as the devices are linked, and responds to the patient saying that his dad was not home.

In this scenario, the Registered Denturist did not ensure that the information sent electronically from patients was secure and kept confidential. The patient filed a complaint about this privacy breach with both the College and the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.