

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL POLICY

1. Background

This document is intended to provide ACCPI members with an awareness of, and guidelines for professional and responsible use of social media and electronic communication devices while engaged in clinical practice.

The use of electronic media is integrated into our culture, a regular part of everyday life worldwide. The tools have a widespread use in both clinical and academic environments as a mechanism to efficiently communicate with other health professionals and patients, for knowledge sharing, and educational purposes. We also acknowledge the difficulties, and risks, in differentiating the boundaries between the professional lives and private lives of individuals.

For the purpose of these guidelines, electronic communication and social media encompasses interaction between: trainer and trainees, supervisor and supervisees, psychotherapists and clients, psychotherapists and other health professionals, and between practitioners and trainees. It includes, but is not limited to, the use of such tools as:

- a) Mobile electronic communication devices for sending and receiving messages or information: cell phone, iPhone (smart phone), Blackberry, Smart Pens, etc. These may have various applications and features including photography.
- b) Use of Social media i.e. web-based forums where users interact on line and share information: e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Wikipedia, Google+, LinkedIn, etc. including emails, blogs, file transfers &/or discussion groups.

Maintaining professional boundaries is an important aspect of professionalism. However, how to function professionally within an evolving environment of electronic communication and social media can be confusing, unclear and vague when interaction is so readily available, and rules of engagement are not well defined. One can unintentionally violate their professional Code of Ethics or breach established Standards of Practice. Indeed, there are examples of mental health facilities, mental health sciences education programs and licensing boards dealing with such breaches of ethics involving use of electronic communication &/or social media. These breaches are considered very serious, often manifesting as a breach in confidentiality (which easily happens with electronic media) and may carry sanctions.

While the principle of confidentiality is well defined and legally enshrined with regard to privacy of personal health information, concerns also exist with interaction between trainees/supervisees and trainers/supervisors in academic and clinical settings.

Guiding principles for this topic can be gleaned from various overarching legal and ethical documents that define professional expectations, with which ACCPI members are expected to comply. It is expected that psychotherapists and trainees maintain ethical standards in both personal and professional lives.

2. Guidelines for responsible use of communicating through connected electronic systems, including the use of Social Media sites

- 2.1. When communicating electronically, ACCPI members are asked to conduct themselves as they would in a face-to-face environment – i.e. with a professional demeanor, and with careful attention to proper etiquette and language.
- 2.2. Before engaging in online communication or posting photos, members need to ask themselves if it would reflect poorly on them or on the profession of psychotherapy. If so, they must refrain from doing so. This includes accessing or distributing objectionable or illegal material.
- 2.3. ACCPI members should never criticize health care professionals, patients / clients (even if unnamed), clinical and/or academic instructors or trainees in online forums. If any member finds himself/herself in need to do this, there are formal avenues available to address concerns.
- 2.4. ACCPI members must consider that all information sent or posted electronically can remain permanent and that it may be accessible to the public even after it is deleted – no security system is perfect. Also, they must keep in mind it is always possible to find the author of information posted in electronic interactions and forums.
- 2.5. ACCPI members must ensure that all privacy settings in their account (s) are set at a high level.
- 2.6. ACCPI members must manage their personal information by monitoring content related to own person - ask others to remove undesirable content relating to them, and request that their name be “tagged” only with their permission.
- 2.7. ACCPI members must alert professional colleagues of inappropriate content on social media sites relating to them.
- 2.8. ACCPI members must not initiate invitations to be online “friends” with patients / clients, and their families. It is best to refrain from accepting “friend” requests from patients / clients, their families, or engaging in any other online communication in which a non-professional relationship develops.
- 2.9. ACCPI members must understand that posting information or discussing confidential details about patients / clients, colleagues, employees or workplace practices, even if unnamed or seemingly anecdotal, is a breach of confidentiality.
- 2.10. When interacting in professionally-oriented social media, ACCPI members must clearly identify themselves.
- 2.11. ACCPI members must be aware that online forums in which clinical advice is posted may be deemed a therapeutic relationship, and an unintended “duty of care” may be established, for which they may be held responsible.
- 2.12. If they become aware of a patient’s personal information from online sites or other sources, ACCPI members must know that this should not be entered into their patient records without their permission.
- 2.13. ACCPI members must not exchange private emails (nor email addresses), text messages or photos with patients.

- 2.14. If they must communicate by email with patients / clients, ACCPI members must not use their personal email address.
- 2.15. On personal sites, ACCPI members must not portray themselves as formally representing the viewpoint of ACCPI.
- 2.16. If they are authorized to use electronic devices, including networked computers owned by ACCPI, members are responsible for protecting the confidentiality and integrity of the information stored on such devices by following the Information Technology policies and procedures of the facility.

3. Use of Portable Electronic Devices

- 3.1. ACCPI members must not, at any time, use their electronic device to conduct personal matters during psychotherapy sessions. They must use designated breaks to attend to personal matters and do so in a non-clinical area.
- 3.2. ACCPI members must not allow their Electronic Device to interfere with psychotherapy at any time. This includes noises that alert to incoming data.
- 3.3. It is forbidden to take patient photos, audio recording, or videos without the knowledge or expressed written consent of the patient /client and the supervisor.
- 3.4. It is forbidden to take or keep/save/store any identifiable patient information or photos at the clinical facility on a personal electronic devices used outside of the clinical facility. Devices that are owned and stored in the facility may be acceptable for these purposes.
- 3.5. Any photo/ video or audio recordings taken during academic activities (lectures, personal development groups, supervision, etc.) must have the permission of the trainer/ supervisor prior to any recording. If other individuals are included in the recordings (e.g. other trainees) then these individuals must give permission. These recordings are only to be used for educational use of the trainee during the training program. Trainees are not to post or share materials without the permission of the trainer.

4. Disciplinary Action

- 4.1. Violations of these guidelines may result in disciplinary action.
- 4.2. Disclosing confidential information breaches privacy policies and may result in severe disciplinary consequences from the Romanian Psychotherapy Federation, The Romanian College of Psychologists or the European Association for Psychotherapy.
- 4.3. Inappropriate use of electronic media may result in criminal charges or other legal action according to applicable laws.

