

ICEA Position Paper

Social Media, Internet Presence, & Privacy

Position

The International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) believes the internet and social media are valuable and important communication and marketing tools. When used wisely, social media expands communication and connectivity. When used improperly or unwisely, it can lead to confidentiality infringements and privacy violations which could result in loss of employment or even criminal penalties. Birth professionals should review the proper use of social media and internet presence while making wise and ethical decisions on information to share.

Background

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2004) defines social media as, “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.” Social media outlets provide an opportunity for connection, collaboration, and marketing. That said, in order for social media marketing to be successful, the user must be highly engaged and knowledgeable of their options (Barker, 2016).

The numerous, ever-changing, social media platforms and applications can be utilized individually, or in combination, depending on the needs of the Certified Professional. These tools can be categorized by function (Ventola, 2014):

- › *Social networking*
- › *Professional networking*
- › *Media sharing*
- › *Content production*

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019), certain questions should be addressed before engaging in social media:

- › *What is the goal?*
- › *Who is the audience?*
- › *Is it worth the time and effort to create and maintain content?*

Implications for Practice

All ICEA Certified Professionals should be aware of the interplay between social media and privacy violations. Different countries have different rules regarding privacy and the protection of healthcare information. In the United States, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provides guidelines for maintaining client/patient privacy in healthcare settings. Individuals (clients/patients) are allowed to decide who has access to their health information and health records.

Providers may not share their client's information without that person's consent- unless it is necessary for their care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). While not every ICEA Certified Professional works in a setting that requires HIPAA compliance, they are reasonable guidelines that can guide ethical decision making related to privacy and information.

While social media has become vital to growing businesses, it is important to realize that once a photo or comment is posted online, it may continue to be accessible and can be reproduced. Most social media sites have in their Terms and Conditions stipulations that, while you own the information posted on your personal social networking accounts, they have the right to access and reuse your content.

ICEA's Guidelines for Use of Social Media

1. Remember the standards of birth professionalism are the same online as in any other circumstances.
2. Comply with licensure requirements as well as state, federal, & copyright laws and/or the laws of your home country.
3. Maintain professional boundaries in the use of social media. Separate personal and professional social media sites.
4. Share only information from credible sources.
5. Refute inaccurate information.
6. Do not offer medical advice or opinion.
7. Do not make negative remarks about clients, employers, colleagues, or birth facilities.
8. Do not take photos or videos of clients on personal devices including cell phones.
9. Do not share information about or images of a client without their written consent.
10. You may share client information in circumstances where it is necessary to protect their safety and/or the well-being of their child(ren).

In conclusion, ICEA recognizes the importance of social media and internet presence in today's society. The use of these tools can greatly enhance our efforts to educate and connect. That said, it is important to maintain professionalism in all facets of digital communication. "Would you say it on a postcard? If not, don't post it online or share it in a public space!" (Vogel, 2020, para.10).

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