

Ep #38: Social Media Do's and Don'ts



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sarah Michelle

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey there, my friends, this episode is going to apply to any of you out there listening right now. So whether you're already the real deal, or you hope to be someday very soon, I wanted to bring you a quick but incredibly important episode on social media do's and don'ts.

Now I know this topic sounds super boring. But I promise this is going to be an episode that you want to listen to. Friends, we have providers out there losing their jobs that they have worked so hard for over posts on social media. And while it isn't fair and it isn't right to have so much taken out of context and misconstrued, it is our responsibility to be in control of our actions, our posts, and what we say online.

And while none of us could possibly be perfect in any setting, we can all try every day to be as cautious as possible to maintain our integrity and maintain our licenses. And so I'm putting this episode out here to you today to try to protect you as a provider. But also try to protect the reputation of our profession as well, since a nurse practitioner I know personally, was recently fired over a simple social media post in what she thought was a private group.

And so my hope and goal with this episode is for that to not happen to any of you out there listening. And while some of these pointers are going to seem more obvious than others, some may come as a shock to you like the fact that liability insurance oftentimes does not cover medical advice given out on social media.

So my first tip to you is to be fully aware and cognizant that no online group is ever private, even if it's stated that it is and even if everyone has to be verified in order to join. Even if it is a group of just your friends or your co-workers, please never consider anything you say online to be private in any capacity.

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It is so easy to take a small snapshot of a conversation or a question and spin it into something else entirely. I know that one of my absolute biggest shocks after nurse practitioner school was learning that in some cases, nurse practitioners are participating in these behaviors online, and delivering content to what is commonly referred to as a troll.

So for those of you a bit more removed from the online space, a troll is simply someone who either antagonizes another person on social media, or will do something anonymously intended to cause harm or trouble. And most of my experience with trolls falls into this latter category. They are out searching on the internet for ways to misconstrue information posted by nurse practitioners, physicians associates, et cetera.

Very sadly and unfortunately, this misconstrued information and interpretation is used as a way to try and tarnish our profession as a whole. Which is the last thing that any of us want after working so hard to even be able to earn this title in the first place.

And second, and this ties into tip number one a bit, we should never be posting patient information on lot. I know this one might seem obvious some of you, but it absolutely had to be included in this episode. In my opinion, it does not matter in the slightest if all the patient identifiers are removed, you run a risk every single time you post about a patient online soliciting feedback.

I know that when you're new and you're nervous, you may want feedback or even just some mental validation. But there are other ways to achieve that without posting about your patient online. This is one of those things that trolls hunt for to use as leverage for backlash and misinformation.

If you're one of those people who need to talk it out with another provider, then please do that with a colleague, someone who's precepted you in the past, another provider in your clinic, et cetera. In addition, this is a great time to utilize all those resources that we covered in that previous FAQ episode, like Epocrates or Medscape or UpToDate.

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If it is something you are truly uncomfortable with treating, then maybe it's time to kind of elevate care a little bit and upgrade and refer that patient out to a specialist that has the upgraded knowledge base about whatever ailment you're trying to treat. But truly, it is never the right time or moment to post online about your patient.

So many of you out there doing it or doing it innocently. And ultimately, you're just trying to get the best care you can for your patient. And while I understand that wholeheartedly, the risk with this one outweighs the benefit every time. Every single time. It's just not worth it.

Which brings me to the ever important point that once something is posted, it lives on the internet for eternity. That's what I want you guys to be thinking about with your posts. Even if you delete the post, number one, it can be recovered if need be. And number two, it's likely that someone got a snapshot of it even if it was posted for less than a few minutes.

I don't want you guys to be scared to post, that's not my intent with this episode. But I always want you to be aware and want you to be mindful of what you post.

Outside of groups on social media, we also need to be cognizant of what we are posting within our own social media profiles. When you gain that title of nurse practitioner, the real deal, right, you are held to a higher standard for your actions. It's just the truth. And this even occurs when you become a nurse as well. You are essentially automatically held to a higher overall standard because of that title that you now get to carry.

And so your social media, especially if it is public, should showcase you as a professional. Now, this doesn't mean you can't post a picture of your dogs or your kids. But it does mean that you should be mindful of what you post and be acutely aware of posting things such as degrading comments, anything sexually explicit, et cetera.

Alongside this, if your accounts are public, employers may also definitely check out your social media during the hiring process. As I employ nurse practitioners personally to join my nurse practitioner success team within

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my company, I am genuine when I say that I look at every one of their social media accounts to ensure that they align with my company's mission and values before ever extending them an opportunity to even interview.

How nurse practitioners present themselves outside of work could ultimately become a reflection of my company. And so doing that extra bit of investigating is a critical part of the hiring process to me. And in the world that we currently live in, you will see more and more of that occurring as you apply for these nurse practitioner jobs.

And I want each of you to make the assumption when you're applying for jobs, that your future employer is checking out your social media. And when they do ask yourself, what does my social media profile say about me and how I present myself as a whole?

I will say something that absolutely shocked me when I became a nurse practitioner is a statement that I mentioned at the beginning of the episode that was told to me by a trusted nurse practitioner mentor of mine. And we were having a conversation one day when she said just kind of offhand, what nurse practitioners post on social media as medical advice is oftentimes not covered by liability insurance. I was like, "Wait, what? What do you mean? I don't get it."

And she explained that a lot of liability insurances have a clause in which they state they do not cover you if you give out medical advice on social media. And so if you were ever to be in a malpractice suit over whatever treatment or suggestion that you recommended, you're not going to be covered by your insurance policy for that. And ever since then, I have made it abundantly clear in my student and my new nurse practitioner groups to make sure that people do not inadvertently get themselves trapped into a situation like this.

Even with patient permission, we do not allow any patient photos or scenarios within my groups in order to protect everyone's best interests. This is once again one of those things with a great intent in mind, but it's also yet another thing where that risk far outweighs the benefit.

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As I want to close this episode out of a story about why I wrote it in the first place a couple of months ago, a nurse practitioner removed all the patient identifiers from a report and posted to what was considered to be a private Facebook group eliciting feedback about the patient's next steps and care.

She received some solid guidance in the comments ever post and was essentially validated in her own decision making, which is great. And then she went on to accurately treat that patient. All as well, no big deal. Weeks went by and all of a sudden, this nurse practitioner receives an anonymous email with a screenshot of her post.

Not only was she harassed and this anonymous email, but this same snapshot was posted online to a website to be shared, and was also emailed anonymously to her employer. Was there any ill intent or desire to compromise patient confidentiality when she made that post? Absolutely not. And like we talked about earlier in this episode, she was seeking validation and the best care possible for her patient.

But how does that post reflect on her? And ultimately, how did that widespread post reflect on her employer and the company she worked for? These are the questions we need to be asking. And ultimately, she was terminated from her position. Not because she compromised HIPAA, because she actually didn't. She was terminated for her poor judgment and decided to post online about it.

And while this situation isn't fair, it could have been prevented if the post had never been posted. If instead, the nurse practitioner reached out to a colleague, or a reputable source, like Medscape or whatever that looks like. But one simple social media post in a private group cost her a job that she absolutely loved.

And so I say all this to say, I'm not trying to scare you. I don't want you to get off of here and deactivate all of your social media accounts as soon as you finish this episode. But I do want you to be incredibly aware of what you're posting every day. I want you to stop, and even if it's just for five

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seconds, think about every post. Would this post be worth losing my career over? No, it wouldn't.

I just want all of you out there to be as protected as possible when you're brand new in this role. And part of that protection revolves around being mindful about how you are presenting yourself in the world of social media that we are all feeding into every single day.

As a nurse practitioner, you will be held as a professional with a higher level of standards and responsibilities. There's no way around it and so we have to find ways to live within those lines to keep ourselves and ultimately our licenses safe. And that's it for this week, guys. Next week, we'll cover something a little bit more lighthearted. I really felt this episode was an absolute must for you.

As an extra bonus, friends, if you're looking for support no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities, we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.