

Social Media 101: The essentials

For more information, please contact Raman Singh by phone 416.599.2580 ext. 3430 or by email raman.singh@oma.org

Table of Contents

1. Social Media 101: Quick Tips

1. What is social media?
2. Benefits
3. Risks
4. Recommendations

2. Twitter:

1. How to sign up for Twitter
2. How to tweet
3. How to change your Twitter profile settings
4. How to follow family and friends on Twitter
5. Suggested follows
6. Twitter de-mystified

3. Facebook:

1. How to sign up for Facebook
2. How to set up your Facebook account
3. Becoming familiar with Facebook
4. Sharing on Facebook
5. Likes, comments, and reshares

4. CMA Social Media Guidelines

Social Media 101: Quick Tips

What is social media?

Social Media is an umbrella term that encompasses the creation and exchange of user-generated content such as photos, videos, text and audio, using web-based and mobile technologies. The spread of social media is promoting a change in the way people use the Internet from purely recreational to professional and clinical usages.

Social media is a venue for engaging online conversations and exchanging ideas and information. Here are some ideas for how, when and why to join the online conversation, as well as some caveats:

Benefits

- **Staying in the know.** Most government organizations, hospitals, associations, and news outlets maintain social media profiles. This will help you stay up to date on news, events, political action, policy changes, and it will give you the opportunity to chime in on online conversation with other medical providers, policy makers, and the public.
- **Positive online identity.** Physician ranking sites such as RateMyMD can often top online search results. These reviews do not always accurately represent the physician. A strong social media presence can provide the public with professional online content that you control.
- **Health promotion.** Social media has been successful in promoting health and wellness and in disseminating important health information. You can maximize engagement through friendly advice, and establish yourself as an online leader in your area of expertise.

Risks

- **Confidentiality.** Material published on the Internet is public. Exercise caution: never identify a patient in any way, and refrain from discussing details of individual cases. You are responsible for protecting physician-patient confidentiality.
- **Think twice, post once.** Be mindful of the information you post online. Social media is instant, and anything you post can be seen by anyone. Refrain from posting derogatory, or misinformed comments. It's important to remember that defamation law applies to content online. Be professional and stick to posting what you're an expert about.

Recommendations

- **Privacy settings.** Twitter and LinkedIn are usually used for professional/personal purposes, while Facebook is mainly used for personal social networking. If you choose to use Facebook to connect with friends and family, make sure you use appropriate privacy settings. They are located under the round widget located at the top far right of the page.
- **Making connections.** Follow organizations and individuals that are of interest to you. Think carefully before "friending" or "following" your patients, clients or their families, as you may forget you're connected and post highly personal information. As always, make sure what you post doesn't violate physician-patient confidentiality.
- **Have fun.** Maintaining an online presence is easy. Have fun with social media and use the opportunity to connect. Engage in professional conversations and friendly debate about the issues and topics that matter most to you. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and spark up conversations with people you don't know.
- If you sign up for social media, make sure to "follow" us on Twitter, and "like" us on Facebook!



/OntariosDoctors



@OntariosDoctors





/OntMedAssociation


How to sign up for Twitter in 5 easy steps:

1. Open your browser and head to www.twitter.com
2. Click **“Get started now”**.
3. **Complete the signup form.** Your selected user name will become your Twitter “address.” so put a little thought into it. (If your desired name is already taken, you’ll have to think of something else.)
4. Click **“Create my account”** and you’re good to go!
5. Make sure to follow **@OntariosDoctors** first

Welcome to Twitter.

Start a conversation, explore your interests, and be in the know.


[View other devices](#)

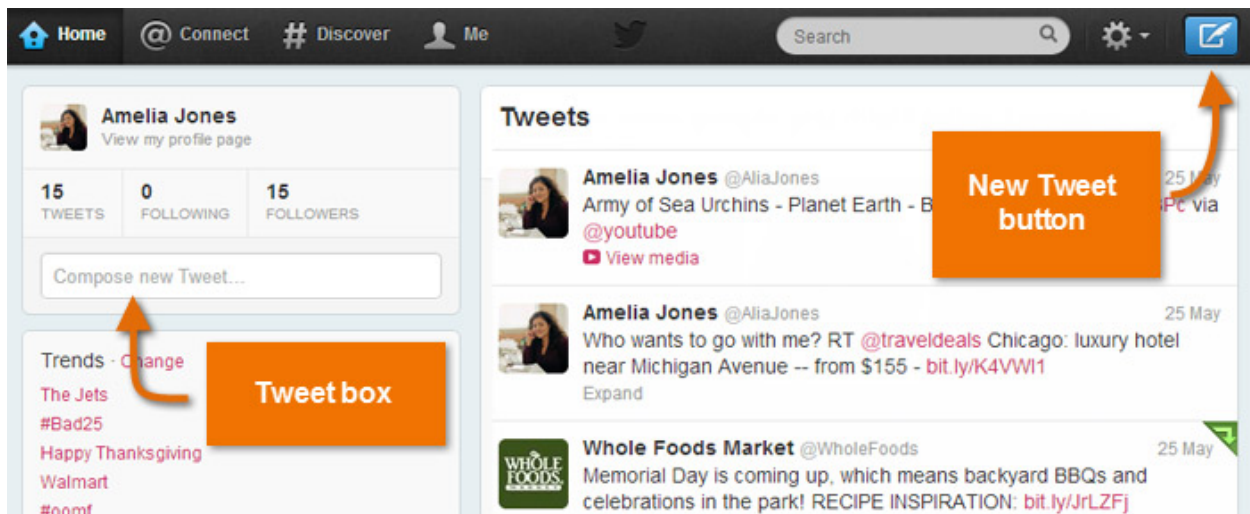


☒ Remember me · [Forgot password?](#)

New to Twitter? Sign up

How to tweet:

1. On the Twitter homepage, type your update into the Tweet box just below your name. You can also click the Tweet button  to start a new tweet from any page.
2. Remember to keep your tweet at 140 characters or less. Twitter will count the characters for you. If you go over the limit, try using abbreviations, or rephrasing some of your sentences.
3. Click the Tweet button when you're ready to post.
4. If you are beginning your tweet with an "@" symbol, make sure to put a "." in front of the "@" symbol. Here's why: <http://thesocialu101.com/tips-tricks-why-the-period-before-twitter-mentions/>

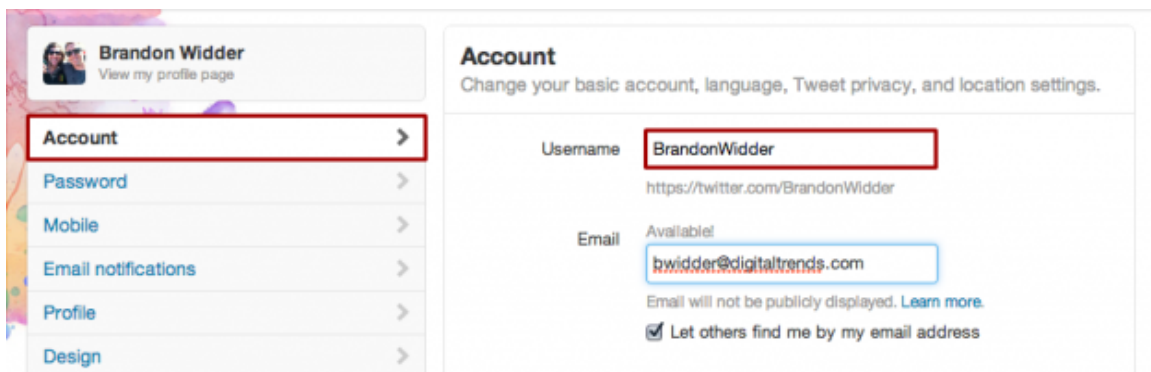


How to change your profile settings:

1. **Access the Account Settings.** Click the gray gear icon in the upper-right corner and select Settings near the bottom of the resulting drop-down menu. The Account Settings tab should open by default, but simply click the *Account* option on the left-hand side to bring up the main interface if it doesn't.



2. **Select Profile.** Type in your desired username Name, Location, Website, Bio (160 characters or less about yourself) and when all is changed/completed, click “save changes”

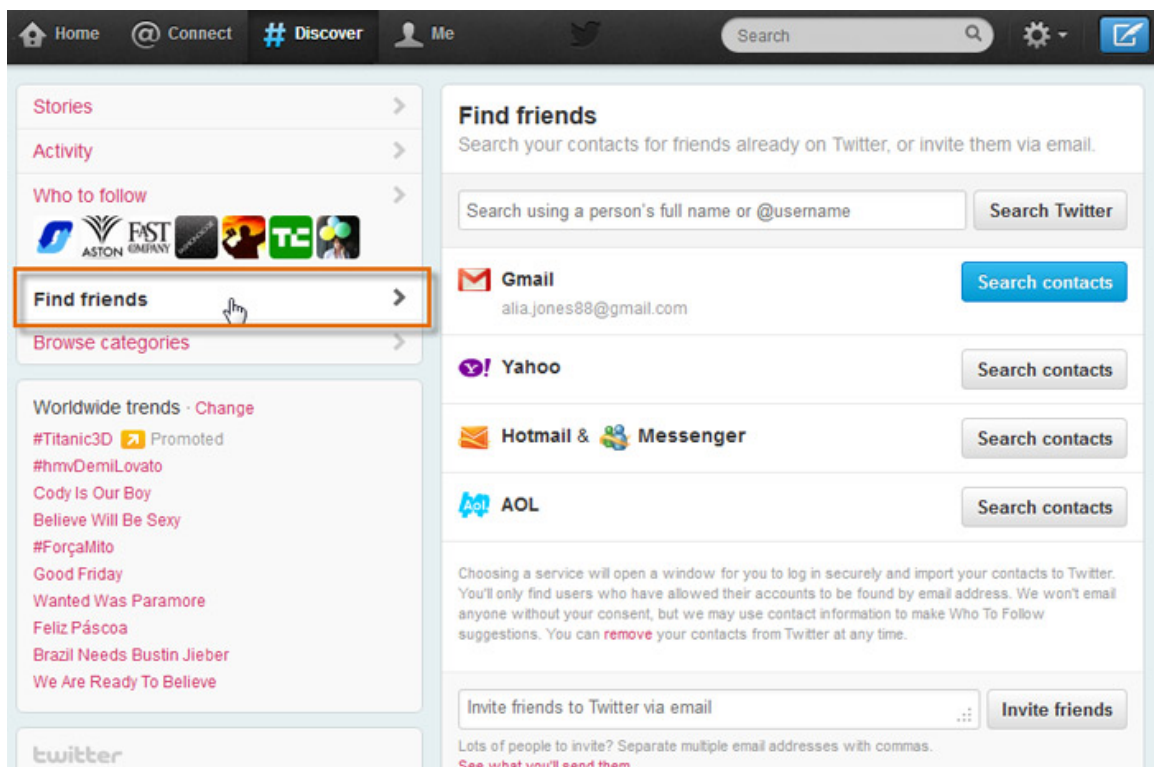


How to follow family and friends:

1. If you haven't done so already, add your family and friends by clicking in the "Search" field at the top of your home page. You can type in a username or first and last name. When you do, you will get a list of users who match your search criteria. Begin "following" them by simply clicking on the **"Follow"** button.



2. You can also find people you know by searching your contacts. Select any service you use, and sign in when prompted to give Twitter access to your personal connections. In this example, the user is about to search their Gmail contacts for friends and family who also use Twitter.



Suggested follows:

HEALTH CARE

@OntariosDoctors (Ontario Medical Association)

@ON_Family Health (OMA section on General and Family Practice)

@ONThealth (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care)

@Ontarionurses (Ontario Nurses Association)

@RNAO (Registered Nurses Association of Ontario)

@OntHospitalAssn (Ontario Hospital Association)

@cpso_ca (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario)

@hcsmdca (Health Care Social Media Canada)

@TOPublicHealth (Toronto Public Health)

@hospitalnewscom (Hospital News)

@CIHI_ICIS (Canadian Institute for Health Information)

@OntPharmacists (Ontario Pharmacists Association)

@CAHO (Council of Academic Hospitals of Ontario)

@HQOntario (Health Quality Ontario)

SECTIONS & PROVINCIAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS

@OMSA_Executive (Ontario Medical Students' Association)

@CMA_Members (Communications to CMA Membership)

@CMA_Docs (Canadian Medical Association)

@CMA_Learns (CMA Physician Leadership)

@ON_FamilyHealth (OMA Section of General & Family Practice)

@OntHeartDocs (Ontario Cardiologists Association)

@OMASport (OMA Sports Medicine Section)

@DoctorsofBC (Doctors of BC)

@BCSurgeons (BC General Surgeons)

@BC_Anesthesia (BC Anesthesiologists)

@Doctors_NS (Doctors of Nova Scotia)

@SMA_docs (Saskatchewan Medical Association)

@Albertadoctors (Alberta Medical Association)

@nb_docs (New Brunswick Medical Association)

@_nlma (Newfoundland & Labrador Medical Association)

@MSPEI_Docs (Medical Society of Prince Edward Island)

@PARO (Professional Association of Resident's Ontario)

@amquebec (Quebec Medical Association)

GOVERNMENT

@DrEricHoskins (Ontario Health Minister)

@Kathleen_Wynne (Ontario Premier)

@Deb_Matthews (President of the Treasury Board)

@DipikaDamerla (Associate Minister of Health)

@brownbarrie (PC Party Leader)

@TimHudak (Former Ontario PC Party Leader)

@andreahorwath (Ontario NDP Party Leader)

@NickelBelt (France Gelinas, NDP Health Critic, Ontario)

@JeffYurekMPP ((Jeff Yurek, PC Health Critic, Ontario)

@pmharper (Prime Minister Stephen Harper)

@MinRonaAmbrose (Minister of Health, Canada)

@HelenaJaczek (Dr. Helena Jaczek, MPP Oakridges-Markham)

MEDIA

@TheTorontoSun
@TorontoStar
@globeandmail
@nationalpost
@MedicalPost
@picardonhealth (National Post's Andre Picard)
@teresaboyle (Toronto Star Health Reporter)
@kellygrant (Globe and Mail Health Reporter)

MEDICAL JOURNALS

@CMAJ_News (Canadian Medical Association Journal)
@BCMedicalJrnl (BC Medical Journal)
@CMRO_Journal (Current Medical Research & Opinion)
@PalliativeMedJ (Palliative Medicine Journal)
@TheLancet (The Lancet)
@NEJM (The New England Journal of Medicine)

HASHTAGS

#onpoli (discussions regarding politics in Ontario)
#cdnpoli (discussions regarding politics in Canada)
#cdnhealth (discussions regarding health care in Canada)
#onhealth (discussions regarding health care in Ontario)
#hcsmdca (health discussions through social media)
#ArtofMedicine (discussions around caring for patients, health care technology, health IT)
#SDOH (discussions around social determinants of health)
#hpm (discussions around hospice and palliative medicine)

Twitter De-Mystified

The Twitter Glossary contains vocabulary frequently used to talk about features on Twitter.

Hashtag “#”

The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.

@

The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets, like this: Hello @Twitter! When a username is preceded by the @ sign, it becomes a link to a Twitter profile.

Bio

A short personal description of 160 characters or fewer used to define who you are on Twitter.

Direct Message (DM)

Also called a DM and most recently called simply a "message," these Tweets are private between the sender and recipient. Tweets sent over SMS become DMs when they begin with "d username" to specify who the message is for.

Mention

Mentioning another user in your Tweet by including the @ sign followed directly by their username is called a "mention". Also refers to Tweets in which your username was included.

Protected/Private Accounts

Twitter accounts are public by default. Choosing to protect your account means that your Tweets will only be seen by approved followers and will not appear in search.

Reply

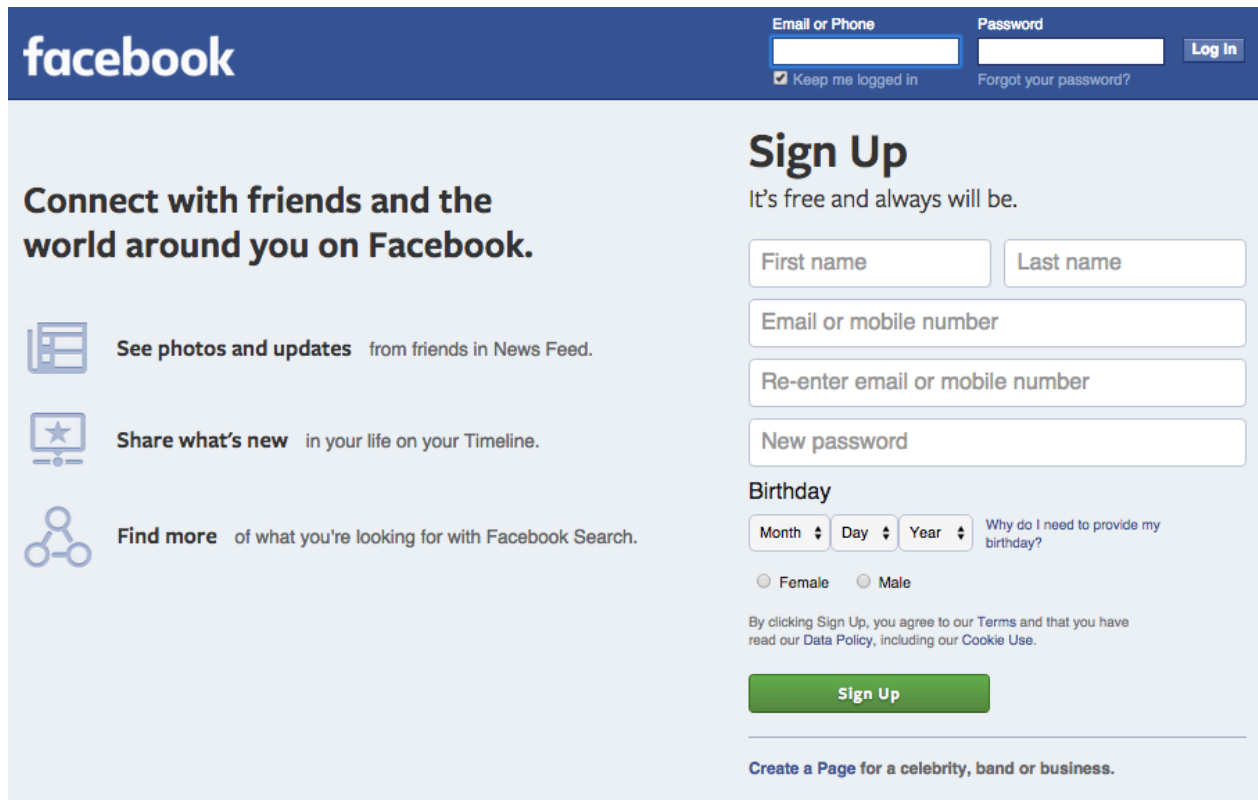
A Tweet posted in reply to another user's message, usually posted by clicking the "reply" button next to their Tweet in your timeline. Always begins with @username.

Retweet (verb)

To retweet, retweeting, retweeted. The act of forwarding another user's Tweet to all of your followers.

How to sign up for Facebook:

1. Go to www.facebook.com.
2. If you see the sign up form, fill out your name, email address or phone number, password, birthday and gender. If you don't see the form, click **Sign Up**, then fill out the form.
3. Click **Sign Up**.



The screenshot shows the Facebook homepage with a dark blue header. On the left, the Facebook logo is visible. On the right, there are login fields for 'Email or Phone' and 'Password', a 'Log In' button, and links for 'Keep me logged in' and 'Forgot your password?'. Below the header, the main content area is light blue. On the left, there's a section titled 'Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook.' with three icons: a photo icon for 'See photos and updates from friends in News Feed.', a star icon for 'Share what's new in your life on your Timeline.', and a search icon for 'Find more of what you're looking for with Facebook Search.'. On the right, there's a 'Sign Up' section with the text 'It's free and always will be.' Below this are several input fields: 'First name', 'Last name', 'Email or mobile number', 'Re-enter email or mobile number', and 'New password'. There's also a 'Birthday' section with dropdowns for 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year', and radio buttons for 'Female' and 'Male'. A link 'Why do I need to provide my birthday?' is next to the birthday fields. Below the sign up fields, there's a green 'Sign Up' button. At the bottom, there's a link 'Create a Page for a celebrity, band or business.'

★

Once you sign up, you'll need to confirm your email address. To do this, sign in to your email account, open the confirmation message from Facebook, and click **Confirm Your Account**.

How to set up your Facebook account:

1. To find friends using your email contacts, enter your email address and click **Find Friends**. This will give Facebook permission to access your email contacts list, so you may be required to sign in to your email account. You can also click Skip this step and add friends later.

The screenshot shows the 'Step 1: Find your friends' screen. At the top, a progress bar highlights 'Step 1' and lists steps: Step 1 (Find your friends), Step 2 (Fill Out Info), Step 3 (Choose Interests), and Step 4 (Add Profile Pic). The main heading is 'Are your friends already on Facebook?' with a subtext: 'Many of your friends may already be here. Searching your email account is the fastest way to find your friends on Facebook. See how it works.' Below this, there are four email service options: Gmail, Outlook.com (Hotmail), Yahoo!, and Other Email Service. Each option has a 'Find Friends' button. The Gmail option is selected, and the email address 'barry.thubbard@gmail.com' is entered in the 'Your Email' field. A hand cursor is pointing at the 'Find Friends' button for Gmail. At the bottom right, there is a 'Skip this step' link. Below the email service options, there is a lightbulb icon and text: 'Facebook stores your contact list for you so that we can help you reach more people and connect friends. Learn more.'

2. If you entered your email address, Facebook will suggest friends for you based on your email contacts. **Click Add Friend** for anyone you want to add as a friend, then **click Save & Continue**.

The screenshot shows the 'Step 2: Add Friends' screen. At the top, a progress bar highlights 'Step 2' and lists steps: Step 1 (Find your friends), Step 2 (Add Friends), Step 3 (Fill Out Info), Step 4 (Choose Interests), and Step 5 (Add Profile Pic). The main heading is 'Add Friends' with a subtext: 'Select your friends from the list below.' Below this, there are two suggested friends: Kymia Sands and Kiva Alston. Each suggestion includes a profile picture, the name, and the text 'is someone you may know.' To the right of each suggestion is an 'Add Friend' button. At the bottom left, there is a 'Back' link. At the bottom right, there is a 'Skip' link and a 'Save & Continue' button. A hand cursor is pointing at the 'Save & Continue' button.

- If you wish to do so, you can now add information about your high school, college, location, and your employer. Click **Save & Continue** when you have filled out all of the information. Click **Skip** if you would rather not fill out this information.

Step 1

Find your friends

Step 2

Add Friends

Step 3

Fill Out Info

Step 4

Choose Interests

Step 5

Add Profile Pic

Fill out your profile info

This information will help you find your friends on Facebook.

High School

Hometown


Current City

College/University

Employer

[Back](#)

[Skip](#)[Save & Continue](#)

 Your schools and employer are currently public to help you connect with classmates and coworkers. You can manage the privacy of your schools and employers by editing your About section.

- On Step four, Facebook will prompt you to choose your interests and like some of the more popular Facebook pages of celebrities or musicians. Click **Save & Continue** when finished. Click **Skip** if you prefer not to follow anything at this time.

Step 1

Find your friends

Step 2

Add Friends

Step 3

Fill Out Info

Step 4

Choose Interests


Step 5

Add Profile Pic

Get Interesting Stories In Your News Feed

Like your favorite Pages to get their latest updates.


Entertainment



Zac Efron

12,480,603 Likes


[Like](#)



Kerry Washington

2,625,734 Likes


[Like](#)



Zachary Quinto

471,379 Likes


[Like](#)



Oprah Winfrey

9,753,870 Likes

[Like](#)




Jack Black

6,440,441 Likes

[Like](#)


[See More](#)

Musicians and Bands




Ariana Grande

[Like](#)



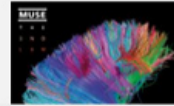
Adam Sandler

[Like](#)




The Weeknd

[Like](#)



Miley Cyrus

[Like](#)



Drake

[Like](#)

[See More](#)

[Back](#)

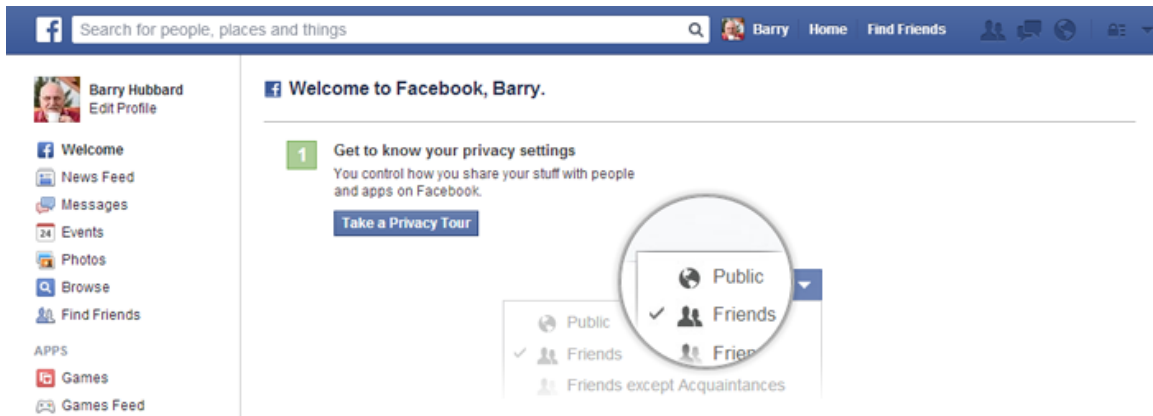
[Skip](#)[Save & Continue](#)

5. You can now add your own profile picture. Click **Upload a Photo** to select a file from your computer. Click **Save & Continue** when finished.

The screenshot shows the Facebook profile setup process at Step 5, 'Add Profile Pic'. At the top, a progress bar indicates the steps: Step 1 (Find your friends), Step 2 (Add Friends), Step 3 (Fill Out Info), Step 4 (Choose Interests), and Step 5 (Add Profile Pic). The main area is titled 'Set your profile picture' and features a placeholder image of a person's silhouette. To the right of the placeholder, there are two options: 'Upload a Photo' with the subtext 'From your computer' and 'Take a Photo' with the subtext 'With your webcam'. A mouse cursor is hovering over the 'Upload a Photo' link. Below these options is a 'Skip' link and a 'Save & Continue' button. At the bottom left, there is a 'Back' link.

Profile pictures and cover photos are public. You can control the audience for other photos you upload to Facebook.

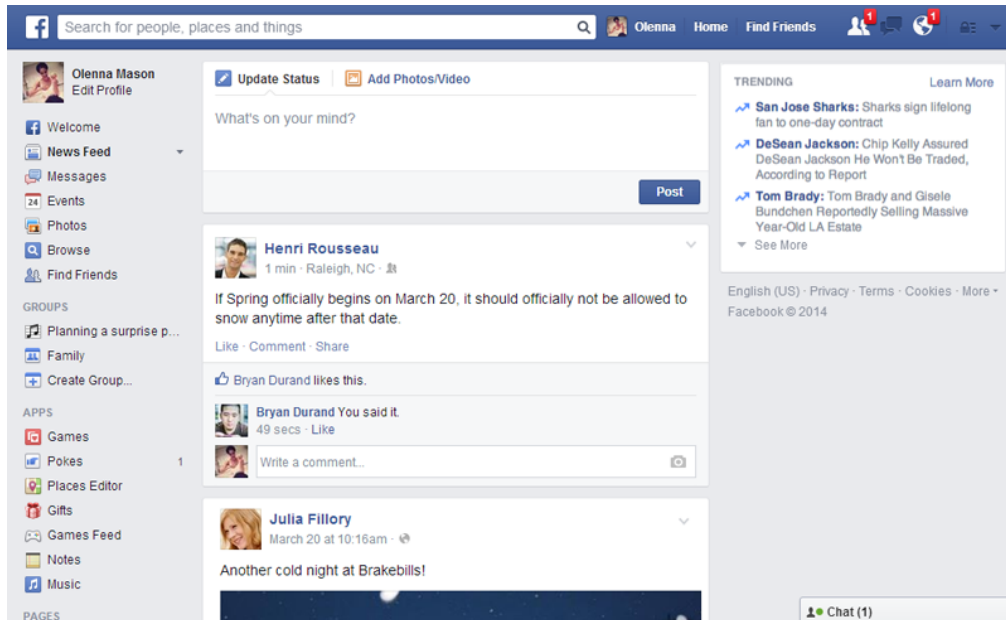
6. Once you have set up your profile, the 'Welcome to Facebook' page will appear. Use this opportunity to explore and take a Privacy Settings Tour of Facebook.



Becoming familiar with Facebook:

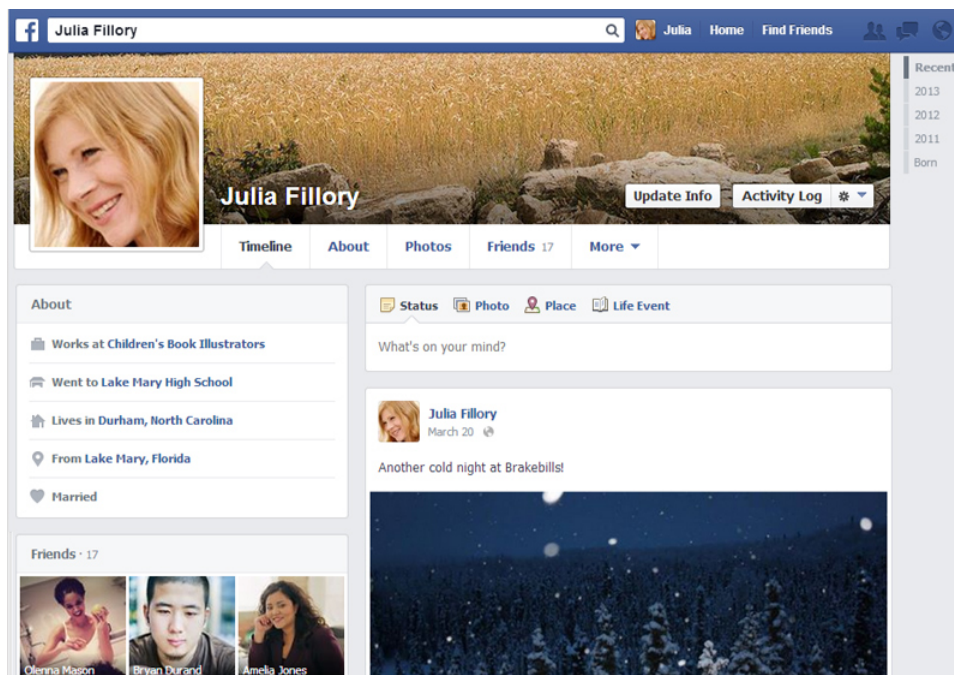
THE HOMEPAGE:

The homepage appears whenever you sign-in to Facebook. The homepage displays your News Feed, which shows the things your friends have shared on Facebook.



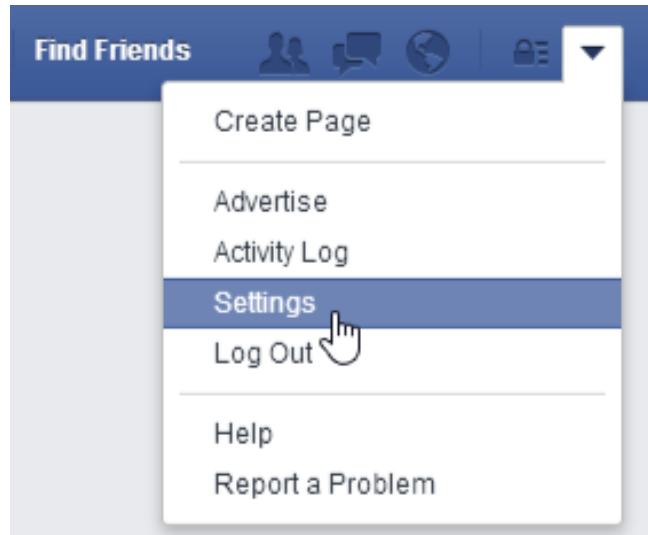
THE TIMELINE:

The Timeline (also called your profile page) is where you'll share information about yourself. Whenever you post an update, it appears right on your Timeline. Your friends can also share posts on your Timeline.



ACCOUNT SETTINGS:

Once you start using Facebook, you may need to modify your Account settings. These settings control things like your password, notifications, and more. To modify your Account settings, click the drop-down arrow on the Toolbar, then select Settings:



Once you click on settings, you will be taken to the Account Settings page, you can then navigate through this page and make the appropriate changes.

Please familiarize yourself with Facebook's privacy settings:

To watch a tutorial on how to navigate Facebook's privacy settings, please click here: <https://www.facebook.com/facebook/videos/366944610483/>

- General
- Security
- Privacy
- Timeline and Tagging
- Blocking
- Notifications
- Mobile
- Followers
- Apps
- Ads
- Payments
- Support Dashboard
- Videos

General Account Settings

Name	Olenna Mason	Edit
Username	http://www.facebook.com/olenna.mason	Edit
Email	Primary: gcf.olenna@gmail.com	Edit
Password	Password last changed over a year ago.	Edit
Networks	No networks.	Edit
Language	English (US)	Edit

[Download a copy of your Facebook data.](#)

Sharing on Facebook:

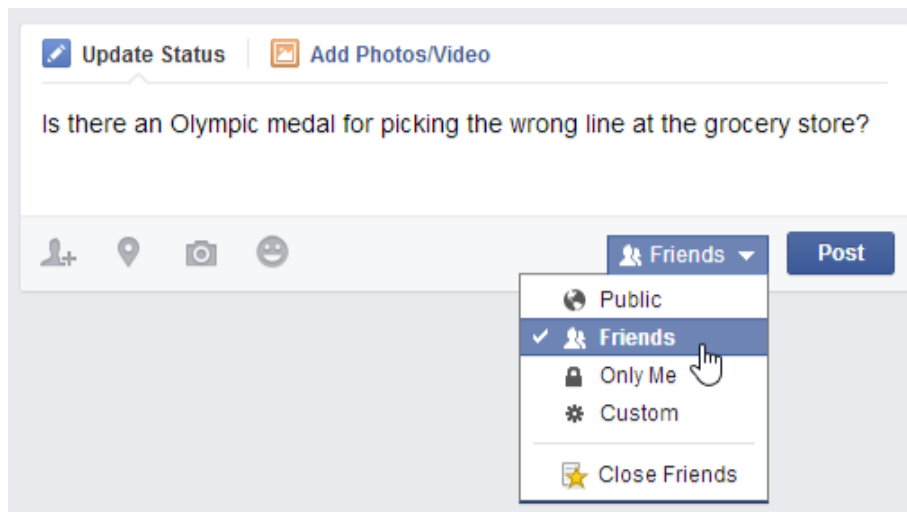
You can share status updates, photos, and links to websites on Facebook. You can also share something with your friends by posting on their Timelines.

A status update is a short text-based post your friends can read. When you post a status update, it will appear on your Timeline, as well as your friends' NewsFeeds.

1. **Type** your status update in the **Publisher** on the **News Feed** or your **Timeline**.



2. Check the audience selector to make sure you're sharing the post with the desired audience:



3. **Click Post**. The status update will appear on your Timeline, on your News Feed, and on your friends' News Feeds.

***You can share photos** on Facebook. Just click **Add Photos/Video** in the Publisher. You can then **upload** a photo from your computer.

***You can share a link** to an article on the web by typing or pasting the link into the Publisher.

Likes, comments, and resharing:

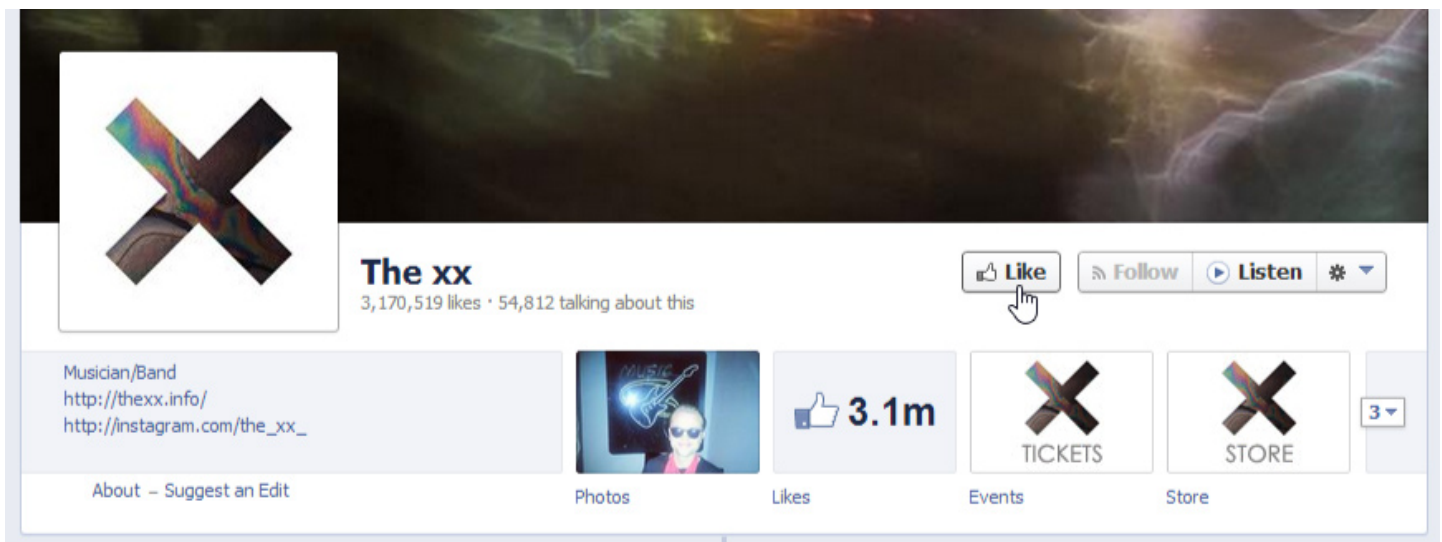
LIKES:

When you're on Facebook, you can like your friends' posts. This is a simple way of showing your friends that you enjoyed what they shared. To like a post, simply click the 'Like' button



LIKING FACEBOOK PAGES:

You can also like the Facebook page for businesses and organizations. This will allow you to receive updates about them in your News Feed:



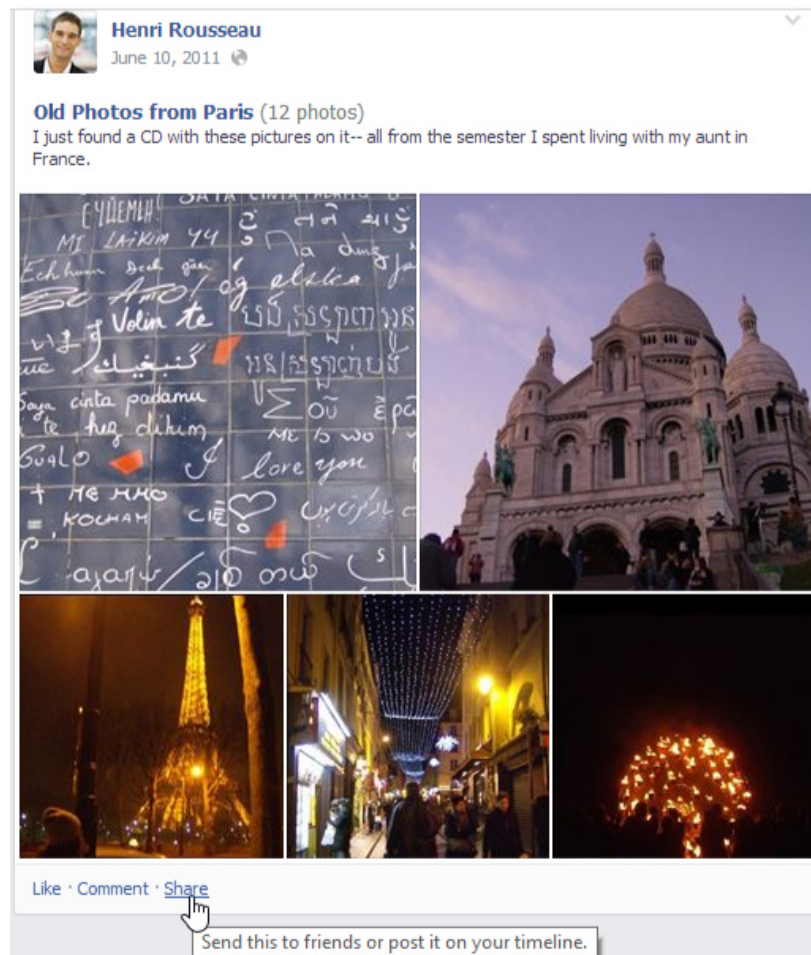
COMMENTS:

You can leave a comment on the posts that your friends share. Your friends will be able to see whenever you comment on something, as will the friends of the person who originally shared the post. To leave a comment, simply type it in the comment box below a post, then press **Enter** on your keyboard.



RESHARING YOUR FRIENDS POSTS, OR POSTS FROM BUSINESS FACEBOOK PAGE:

Facebook makes it easy to reshare the things your friends post. Just click **Share** at the bottom of a post to share it with your other friends.



Social media and Canadian physicians: Issues and rules of engagement

Important note:

For Canadian physicians, regulations and guidelines from provincial regulatory authorities or employers take precedence over any of the guidance provided here. Certain regulatory authorities such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick have issued guidelines or statements with respect to social media.¹

Social media: What does it mean?

Social media are everywhere in Canadian society today. From Facebook to YouTube to Twitter, everyone seems to be engaged in electronic communications in some form or another with friends, family, colleagues and even complete strangers on websites and through mobile applications. Social media have changed the way people build relationships, communicate, interact and gather and disseminate information.

To many people, social media are just the names of well-known online products — Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. But in the broader sense, social media can be defined as a set of web-based and mobile technologies that allow people to monitor, create, share or manipulate text, audio, photos or video, with others. This information can be shared unidirectionally (e.g. posting text to one's own blog) or multidirectionally (e.g. contributing to a discussion on an online forum). Social media places particular emphasis on interactive, user-driven communication.

Social media and patients

There is currently widespread discussion among health care professionals, academics, social media observers and the public about how social media can and should be used in health care. The evidence base is currently lacking on whether the use of social media can improve patient outcomes.² But it is undeniable that the internet and social media platforms have become an integral part of

© 2011 Canadian Medical Association. You may, for your non-commercial use, reproduce, in whole or in part and in any form or manner, unlimited copies of CMA Policy Statements provided that credit is given to the original source. Any other use, including republishing, redistribution, storage in a retrieval system or posting on a Web site requires explicit permission from CMA. Please contact the Permissions Coordinator, Publications, CMA, 1867 Alta Vista Dr., Ottawa ON K1G 5W8; fax 613 565-2382; permissions@cma.ca.

Correspondence and requests for additional copies should be addressed to the Member Service Centre, Canadian Medical Association, 1867 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa, ON K1G 5W8; tel 888 855-2555 or 613 731-8610 x2307; fax 613 236-8864.

All policies of the CMA are available electronically through CMA Online (www.cma.ca).

how patients and members of the public seek information about health and increase the sense of engagement patients have in their own care. Through a variety of websites and fuelled by the growing availability of electronic patient health records, patients are increasingly sharing information with other patients about their health conditions and their health care providers.

Social media and physicians: risks and benefits

For physicians, social media provide a unique set of opportunities and challenges. There is growing debate about whether the medical profession should play a role in using social media to communicate more effectively with individual patients and the patient community at large. The reality is that individual doctors and medical organizations have to consciously decide if, why and how to use the various social media platforms. While use of social media could potentially increase the exposure of physicians to disciplinary and medico-legal issues, those physicians who choose to use social media can help shape how these tools can improve health care in the future.

Social media pose a challenge for physicians (and other professionals) in terms of separating one's personal and professional lives. While such a separation is a fundamental tenet of the medical profession, social media blur such boundaries in ways that can enrich communications, but can also put physicians at risk. It is an entirely new environment that medical professionalism has not yet satisfactorily addressed.

When communicating through social media, physicians must remember they remain governed by the same ethical and professional

standards that have always applied and that are paramount.

As recent findings show, Canadian physicians believe social media present a variety of professional and legal risks, and they are uncertain of the potential benefits of these new forms of communication and interaction.³

CMA's role

This document is intended to provide guidance on how Canadian medical students, residents, fellows and practising physicians can approach social media, by acknowledging the potential benefits as well as the challenges and risks.

While these guidelines are based on the best available evidence, this is a constantly evolving field where technological innovations can change the playing field almost overnight. As such, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) will review and update this document as required.

As an association, the CMA has a responsibility and obligation to its members to provide guidance about social media. In addition, the CMA monitors social media trends in health care and will attempt to speak for the profession as a whole to ensure social media are used in a way that provides maximum benefit to both patients and physicians.

The CMA acknowledges that, when social media become integrated into the health care delivery system, the individual provinces and territories will need to explore how to appropriately remunerate physicians for their time and activities.

Key issues

Patient confidentiality

- The privacy and security of individual patient information is paramount and should never be shared beyond the circle of care. This principle is also enshrined in CMA policy.⁴ In communicating with an individual patient in other than a face-to-face environment, a secure electronic communication platform must be used.⁵ Identifiable patient information, including images, should never be posted online or shared in electronic communications of a general nature.
- When using social media, physicians should endeavour to use the most stringent security and privacy settings available for the particular platform.
- Physicians with employees should make them aware of issues concerning patient confidentiality in their own use of social media. Consideration should be given to instituting a social media policy for the office or practice.
- Social networking sites cannot guarantee confidentiality. Anything written on a social networking site can theoretically be accessed and made public. For example, the Patriot Act in the United States makes it possible for the U.S. government under certain conditions to access any information posted on a social networking site or website hosted by a U.S. service provider, even if this information is located within the “private or direct message” area of the site.

Professionalism

- Having an online profile or identifiable presence on social media can have the same degree of positive or negative impact on a physician’s social reputation as being active in any other public venue. In fact, having access to a global audience can magnify this reputation.
- The most effective use of social media often involves communicating information that is both personal and professional. However, physicians must retain the appropriate boundaries of the patient-physician relationship when dealing with individual patients. The same standards of professionalism that would apply in face-to-face physician-patient interactions also apply in electronic interactions.
- If a physician is an employee of a health care institution or organization that has social media guidelines in place, he or she should review these and act accordingly.

Online communication issues

- Electronic communications are not anonymous and are always stored in some form. As such, it is possible to trace the author of a comment even if posted anonymously.
- Once their material is published online, authors of comments on social media sites no longer control how and where the information is disseminated, and these comments can sometimes lose context.
- Postings to social media sites are subject to the same laws of

copyright, libel and defamation as written or verbal communications.

Potential benefits

- More frequent communication with patients and the public improves the quality of medical care and satisfaction with physician care. Social media can enhance the role of traditional media in delivering important public health messages.
- Use of social media can provide patients and the public with quicker and easier access to medical expertise, often in a way that is more current, clear and concise than traditional media sources.
- Posting (with copyright permission) evidence-based medical information on social media sites can improve the quality of health information made available to patients and the public

Rules of engagement

The following should be kept in mind when using social media:

- Understand the technology and your audience

The many social media platforms work in different ways and often have different goals. Even broad types of social media such as social networking sites have different terms and conditions under which they operate. Some social networking sites, for example Facebook, are intended for use by everyone, but you set your own network of people you know.

Others, like Twitter, are designed for interacting with people you might not know at all. And others still, such as Asklepios, are intended for peer-to-peer interaction between Canadian physicians only. In order to use social media effectively, it is necessary to have a good understanding of how they work and who your intended audience will be before using them.

- Be transparent

Identify clearly who you are and any potential conflicts of interest you may have in association with information you are providing. Being transparent encourages more honest interaction with others and a more productive outcome. If you are discussing medical or health issues, it is probably beneficial to identify yourself as a physician. If you are employed by an institution or organization, you should state either that you are reflecting corporate policies or that the views expressed are yours alone and not those of your employer.

When participating on a social networking site such as Facebook that may include patients in your practice, you should avoid communicating personal or private information. It is possible to establish a professional page, where you can post information about your practice and general health information and links.

- Respect others

If you are posting information created by somebody else, proper permission should be obtained and acknowledgement given. Most social media sites have their own sets of rules, guidelines and etiquette, and these should be followed. If uncertain of how a specific site operates, spend more time listening and reading, prior to engaging in active dialogue. Always respect the principle of patient confidentiality.

- Focus on areas of expertise

As a physician you can often bring most value to a forum or conversation by discussing issues on which you have a particular expertise. Sharing this information – as long as it does not contravene individual patient confidentiality – raises the level of discourse on social media sites and is likely to be viewed favourably by other participants.

You should anticipate that the information you provide on social media may be challenged by both other physicians and non-physicians. Remember to keep the tenor of the debate at a civilized level and do not be unnecessarily offended if your viewpoint is rejected, even if you do feel it is based on best available evidence.

If you choose to use your own website to communicate to a non-medical audience about medical or health

issues, you should include a terms of use agreement to advise users that information is intended for Canadian residents and that individual health queries will not be addressed.⁶

Footnotes

¹ [College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia Social Media and Online Networking Forums](https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/u6/Social-Media-and-Online-Networking-Forums.pdf) (<https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/u6/Social-Media-and-Online-Networking-Forums.pdf>) ; College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick Facebook Guidelines (<http://www.cpsnb.org/english/Guidelines/Facebook.htm>)

² However, numerous research studies are showing that social media tools and resources are being used to provide patients with health information and attempt to change health-related behaviours. See, for example, the abstracts of presentations from the four Med 2.0: Social Media and Web 2.0 in Health conferences

(<http://www.medicine20congress.com/ocs/index.php/med/med2011>),

or papers published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (<http://www.jmir.org/>)

³ [Social media use by physicians](http://www.cma.ca/advocacy/social-media-use-physicians) (<http://www.cma.ca/advocacy/social-media-use-physicians>)

⁴ CMA Health Information Privacy Code (http://www.cma.ca/index.php?ci_id=53584&la_id=1)

⁵ CMA Physician Guidelines for Online Communications with Patients (<http://policybase.cma.ca/dbtw-wpd/PolicyPDF/PD05-03.pdf>)

⁶ Health promotion: CMPA will assist (http://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/cmpapd04/docs/member_assistance/more/com_is0890-e.cfm)

