

### **Proposed New Position Statement Regarding the Use of Social Media for Nurses**

#### **Summary of Request:**

This report contains the recommendations of staff for a position statement with regard to the use of social media for nurses.

#### **Historical Perspective:**

Board position statements do not have the force of law, but are a means of providing direction for nurses on issues of concern to the Board relevant to protection of the public. Position statements are used to communicate the Board's regulatory approach on a particular topic.

Board staff has drafted this position statement in response to the Board's request for a position statement regarding nurses and the use of social media. With the rapidly growing use of social media sites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and blogs, professional obligations to patients, peers, and employers may be unclear. While the Board recognizes that the use of social media can be a valuable tool in healthcare, there are potential serious consequences if used inappropriately. Online postings may harm patients if protected health information is disclosed. These types of postings may reflect negatively on individual nurses, the nursing profession, the public's trust of the nursing profession, as well as jeopardize careers. This position statement clarifies the appropriate use of social media by nurses in the state of Texas.

A copy of the proposed position statement is attached (attachment #1).

#### **Pros:**

Adoption of the proposed position statement will provide guidance to all nurses in Texas based on current research, and will offer clarification of frequently asked questions. As this information is available on the BON web page, it can be readily accessed without delays that could occur were it necessary to speak with board staff via phone or email for this same information. The link at the end of the position paper will take you directly to the NCSBN's website which contains additional information regarding the use of social media.

#### **Cons:**

None noted.

#### **Recommendations:**

Move to adopt the new position statement with allowance for non-substantive word editing for purposes of clarity as may be deemed necessary by Board counsel.

### Position Statement: Use of Social Media for Nurses

With the rapidly growing use of social media sites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and blogs, professional obligations to patients, peers, and employers may be unclear. While the Board recognizes that the use of social media can be a valuable tool in healthcare, there are potential serious consequences if used inappropriately. Online postings may harm patients if protected health information is disclosed. These types of postings may reflect negatively on individual nurses, the nursing profession, the public's trust of our profession, as well as jeopardize careers.

Both the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) and the American Nurses Association (ANA) endorse each other's guidelines and principles on the use of social media in order for it to be used appropriately and without harm to patients. The benefits of social media are many, and include:

- "Networking and nurturing relationships
- Exchange of knowledge and forum for collegial interchange
- Dissemination and discussion of nursing and health related education, research, best practices
- Educating the public on nursing and health related matters" (ANA, 2012, para. 4).

However, if used indiscriminately, the risks are great, and include:

- "Information taking on a life of its own where inaccuracies become fact
- Patient privacy being breached
- The public's trust of nurses being compromised
- Individual nursing careers being undermined" (ANA, 2012, para. 5).

In a recent survey by the NCSBN, many of the responding boards reported that they had received complaints about nurses inappropriately using social media sites. Nurses have been disciplined by boards, fired by employers, and criminally charged for the inappropriate or unprofessional use of social media (NCSBN, 2012).

To ensure the mission to protect and promote the welfare of the people of Texas, the Texas Board of Nursing supports both the guidelines and principles of social media use by NCSBN and the ANA. In keeping with the NCSBN guidelines, it is the Board's position that

- *Nurses must recognize that they have an ethical & legal obligation to maintain patient privacy and confidentiality at all times.*
- *Nurses are strictly prohibited from transmitting by way of any electronic media any patient-related image. In addition, nurses are restricted from transmitting any information that may be reasonably anticipated to violate patient rights to confidentiality or privacy, or otherwise degrade or embarrass the patient.*
- *Do not identify patients by name or post or publish information that may lead to the identification of a patient. Limiting access to postings through privacy settings is not sufficient to ensure privacy.*
- *Do not refer to patients in a disparaging manner, even if the patient is not identified.*

