

BACKGROUND

The responsible use of social media by psychiatrists and trainees can enhance communication, education, and advocacy in the field of mental health. Social media is increasingly being used by the RANZCP as a communications tool, and is also an increasingly important way for members to connect with each other, share information and discuss topics of interest.

It is important to recognize that all social media activity is public, and activity on RANZCP channels has the potential to cause reputational harm to the RANZCP or the profession; and/or to negatively impact people, including those affected by mental illness.

The RANZCP is also a collegiate and professional organisation, and poor behaviour or inappropriate posts by individual members on social media (including in closed groups) can be harmful to the wider membership and impact our sense of community as a College.

1. PURPOSE

This document is intended to provide guidance to College members on appropriate standards of behaviour and professionalism when using social media, in particular on College platforms, when interacting with other members and/or the College, and when communicating about matters that relate to the RANZCP or the profession of psychiatry.

2. APPLICATION

This Guideline applies to all RANZCP members, including Trainees, candidates on the RANZCP Specialist Pathway to Fellowship and those participating in the RANZCP Continuing Professional Development Program.

(NB: A separate Social Media Policy exists for staff employed by the RANZCP, setting out responsibilities on College staff with respect to the use of social media both in a professional and personal capacity.)

3. DEFINITION

'Social media' is a term that is constantly evolving but generally refers to internet-based tools that allow individuals and groups to communicate, to advertise or share opinions, information, ideas, messages, experiences, images, and video or audio clips. They may include blogs, social networks, video and photo-sharing sites, wikis, or a myriad of other media, used for:

- Social networking (Facebook, X – previously Twitter, WEChat, Weibo, WhatsApp)
- Professional networking (LinkedIn)
- Discussion forums (Reddit, Whirlpool)
- Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr, Instagram)
- Content production (blogs [Tumblr, Blogger] and microblogs [X – previously Twitter])
- Knowledge/information aggregation (Wikipedia)
- Virtual reality and gaming environments (Second Life), and
- Booking sites and apps (HealthEngine, Whitecoat, Podium).

(Taken from the Medical Board of Australia: [Social Media – How to Meet your Obligations under the National Law.](#))

4. APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

All College members are expected to comply with the professional and ethical standards outlined in the RANZCP's Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, and Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment Policy when interacting with the College and its members via social media platforms.

Principle 10 of the [RANZCP's Code of Ethics](#) sets out that psychiatrists shall uphold the integrity of the medical profession, specifically including:

10.2 – Psychiatrists shall promote mutual respect among their colleagues in psychiatry, other health professionals and their patients.

10.3 – Psychiatrists shall express their views respectfully in a manner that avoids self-promotion or denigration of others.

10.5 – Psychiatrists shall contribute to the promotion of a professional environment with an ethos characterised by mutual respect, and free of discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

The RANZCP recommends a considered and common-sense approach to the use of social media, and that all users view their use of social media as an extension of their professional lives.

Members' behaviour on social media should be informed by the following principles:

- **Professionalism:** RANZCP members should conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, adhering to the core RANZCP values of *Respect, Collaboration, Excellence, Action*. The same standards of professional behaviour that are expected when conducting RANZCP business in person also apply when participating through social media.
- **Respect:** Social media users should respect diverse opinions and maintain a respectful tone in all social media interactions. Any criticism or debate must be constructive and personal attacks are not acceptable. RANZCP members should avoid posting anything on social media which they would not be willing to say in person, either to an individual or in a group. Peer moderation can also be effective in maintaining a respectful environment on social media, and members should be encouraged to speak up and call out any inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour if they see this occurring.
- **Accountability:** When sharing information related to psychiatry and mental health, RANZCP members should strive to ensure that it is evidence-based, refrain from using stigmatising language or perpetuating stereotypes related to mental health and promote a compassionate and understanding approach to mental health issues.
- **Personal Use:** When using social media platforms for personal purposes, RANZCP members are encouraged to exercise caution and consider the potential impact of their posts on their professional reputation and the reputation of the RANZCP. When engaging in social media discussions that relate to psychiatric or mental health topics, personal opinions must be clearly distinguished from official RANZCP positions. Any statements made on behalf of the RANZCP must be authorised pursuant to the [Media and Communications Policy](#).
- **Privacy:** RANZCP members should not share personal information of other members without consent.

5. ADHERENCE

The RANZCP has a zero tolerance approach to inappropriate behaviour. It reserves the right to remove any content posted on official RANZCP social media platforms, and which violates these Guidelines, at its own discretion.

The RANZCP takes breaches of the following documents seriously:

- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Code of Ethics](#)
- [Discrimination Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)

Breaches of these documents are dealt with through existing mechanisms, and in accordance with the powers of the College to take action with respect to Membership under the [RANZCP Constitution](#).

For further information, refer to the [Appeals and Complaints](#) page on the RANZCP website.

6. REVIEW

This Guideline will be reviewed and updated once every two years or as required.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- [RANZCP Constitution](#)
- [RANZCP Code of Ethics](#)
- [RANZCP Code of Conduct](#)
- [Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Referral of matters to the Membership Conduct Committee Procedure](#)
- [Board Election Campaign Activities Policy](#)
- [Media and Communications Policy](#)
- [RANZCP Privacy Policy](#)
- [Position Statement 75: Psychiatrists, online presence and social media](#)
- [Position Statement 48: Safety and wellbeing of psychiatrists and those in psychiatry training](#)
- [Medical Board of Australia: Social Media – How to Meet your Obligations under the National Law](#)
- [Medical Council of New Zealand: Use of Internet and Electronic Communication](#)
- [Social media and the medical profession](#) - A joint initiative of the Australian Medical Association Council of Doctors-in-Training, the New Zealand Medical Association Doctors-in-Training Council, the New Zealand Medical Students' Association and the Australian Medical Students' Association
- [A guide to social media and medical professionalism](#) – reviewed and endorsed by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and its Council of Doctors in Training (AMACDT), the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA), the New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA), and the Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) with input from Avant and MDA National
- RANZCP Social Media Policy (internal document applicable to College staff)

Revision record

Contact:	Executive Manager, Membership, Events & Publications		
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27 February 2024	1.0	B2024/OOS 06	New document
15 August 2024	1.1	Executive Manager, Membership, Events and Publications	Minor updates to further clarify expectations when interacting with the RANZCP and with official RANZCP platforms.
NEXT REVIEW: 2026			