



Avoiding career stallers and stoppers

Would you want your employer—or your patients—to see your last social media post?

A NEWLY GRADUATED NURSE asked me how she could avoid the “job stupid stuff,” as she called it. She wanted to know what actions might hurt her career long-term, such as what happened to a friend who posted a patient’s picture on Facebook and lost her job (and her license) as a result.

I asked that question at a national meeting session, and the floodgates opened with stories, know-how, and raw feelings about real-world incidents, all pointing to ways to enhance a career versus stalling it, or worse, stopping it. This was no ordinary group of nurses. It was a gathering of some of the best and brightest staff and leaders I’ve ever met. And in terms of the stories I heard, some were really scary. Career path disruptors don’t have to be professional practice errors, but they do cross professional boundaries.

Social media violations—Highly visible career stallers

Why does anyone, especially a nurse, think that he or she is invisible on Facebook? How many stories do we have to hear, how many policies have to be written, how many licenses have to be revoked, before the nursing profession stops losing its talent to these types of blunders?

Here are two cases of social media missteps that resulted in severe consequences, told by those who were there:

1. A nurse didn’t think twice about posting her photo with a wine glass tied at the end of a lanyard around her neck with the comment, “I’m tired and overworked...time to do some drinking.” She was still wearing her work scrubs with the hospital logo clearly evident. In only a few days, she left the hos-

pital for “personal reasons.” At the time that she posted her photo, she didn’t think she was doing anything wrong. Now she knows better.

2. An entire group of emergency department nurses decked out in hats and boas posted a picture toasting in the New Year with champagne bottles visible, surrounded by paramedics and patients. Nine experienced clinical staff lost their jobs, and who knows how the hospital’s reputation suffered. Not one person in the entire team recognized wrongdoing? It’s hard to believe, but true.

Short-term post, long-term pain?

Social media channels are growing, including Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and more.

Facebook even has live video capability. Each offers the opportunity to bolster or tarnish a reputation. Every picture and every comment tells a story.

Is there such a thing as being too social? Personally, perhaps not; but professionally, yes. ANA and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing offer helpful resources defining professional boundaries and social media issues.

I refer to them all the time and encourage you to do the same. It’s amazing to think that whatever is posted online is truly visible to the entire world. We’ll be judged by the pictures we post and the words we write next to them. If your next employer were to read your last 100 days of social media posts, would he or she be impressed or distressed?

I tried to find a hard number in terms of how many nurses have lost promotions, jobs, or licenses due to social media indiscretions, and I learned that there’s no one, big number. The fact is, though, a promising career can be stalled, delayed, or even ended faster than the time it takes to power up a smartphone. Don’t let it be yours.



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