



17 - Social Media Use by Emergency Physicians

(Adopted – October 2012)

Introduction: With the increasing access to social media outlets, networks and websites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc., the ability of physicians to connect with sites to reference material, post interesting cases and communicate with patients will increase exponentially. Institutions must develop their own guidelines for use of these social media outlets within their own organizations, however, the following general guidelines should be considered.

Patient Interactions: Physicians are advised to only have online interactions with patients regarding their medical treatment and these types of interactions should never occur on personal social networks or on social media, such as Facebook or LinkedIn.

Medical Discussions Between Physicians: Physicians may discuss interesting cases or seek information about disease modalities and treatment patterns on secure medical sites, such as Doximity, a professional network site that secure and available for peer-to-peer communication. Physicians must never post patient names or photos with faces on such sites.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Physicians must remember that patient privacy and confidentiality has to be their utmost concern and must be protected at all time. Because these sites are open to the public postings of conditions, advice or personal information must never be disclosed.

Content: Physicians must be aware that anything posted on a social media outlets, network or website is subject to dissemination, intentionally or unintentionally, to a broader audience. Information may remain on such sites in perpetuity and has the potential for out-of-context usage. If posting is necessary, physicians must disclose that they are a health professional and any conflicts that may exist. Postings must be appropriate and professional. When monitoring posts, it is the responsibility of the physician-poster to monitor and correct or delete any inaccurate information.

Individual institutions and employers have the right to edit, modify or delete any internet communications made by physicians in their employment.

Sanctions: Physicians must remember that it is within the purview of state medical boards to discipline physicians who exhibit unprofessional behavior relating to the inappropriate use to social networking media; including but limited to

- Inappropriate communication with patients online
- Use of the Internet for unprofessional behavior
- Misrepresentation of credentials online
- Violations of patient confidentiality online
- Failure to disclose conflicts of interest online



- Derogatory remarks regarding a patient made online
- Depiction of intoxication online
- Discriminatory language or practice online

Such disciplinary actions can range from a letter of reprimand to the revocation of licensure.

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