



Use of Social Networking Sites and Other Electronic Media by Medical Students

There has been ongoing concern about the non-professional use of Facebook and other similar sites by students across the country. We all recognize that these sites provide an interesting way of connecting with others, but it is important that our professional responsibilities are not compromised by posting on these sites.

Here are some examples of postings that could be considered problematic based on actual incidents that have been brought to our attention.

1) Posting pictures of patients online is potentially problematic REGARDLESS of whether they consented to being photographed for educational reasons. Posting pictures with identifying information is clearly inappropriate; posting pictures with clinical findings but no identifying information may be considered reasonable if the specific site is directed at medical students and/or health professionals.

2) Accepting as “friends” on Facebook individuals whom you have come to know in a clinical setting is problematic. Appropriate boundaries between personal and professional relationships should be maintained. Further information on this issue is available at the CPSO website (http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/downloads/cpsodocuments/policies/policies/sexual_abuse_boundaries.pdf).

3) If you post information describing interpersonal interactions or challenges encountered in clinical settings, you must ensure that readers cannot identify their particular patient or family.

We provide these examples to highlight a common theme that as medical students we need to be careful about what we say/post online, remembering that it is very much a public forum, and patients and colleagues have access to it. Facebook and other networking sites are indeed very useful for staying in touch and many physicians use Facebook groups/email/forums to post advice to their patients. This is something we all might take advantage of in the future.

This reminder should not be seen as a veiled attack on our freedom but rather a reminder that as health professionals we are constantly in the public's eye, including those in cyber-space.

We look forward to ongoing discussion about the use of these kinds of media. Please feel free to contact any of us to discuss particular questions or concerns.

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