

Social Media Policy

PREAMBLE:

The use of social media has increased in all industries including health care and biomedical research. This policy is intended to be used as a guide to encourage School of Medicine (SOM) medical and graduate students who use social media to protect themselves from the unintended consequences of such practices and to maintain public trust. The term “social media” should be broadly understood for purposes of this policy to include but not be limited to blogs, wikis, microblogs, message boards, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, and social networking sites. The SOM is a principled organization, and as such, has an interest in its medical and graduate students being above reproach in the eyes of their peers and the public. This document is crafted to help the medical and graduate students navigate the continually changing world of social media.

Participating thoughtfully in social networking and other similar Internet opportunities can support personal expression, enable individuals to have a professional presence online, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the healthcare and biomedical research professions, and provide opportunity to widely disseminate public health messages, scientific observations, and related communications. However, social networks, blogs, and other forms of communication online also create new challenges to interpersonal relationships. Medical professionals, including those still in training, should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:

POLICIES:

Privacy and Confidentiality

- a. SOM medical and graduate students must be cognizant of, and adhere to, standards of patient privacy and confidentiality in all environments, including online, and must refrain from posting potentially identifiable patient information on personal accounts or websites, when valid, written permission was not given by the patient. Posting any patient information, photos, commentary, content or images may be a breach in confidentiality that could be harmful to the patient and may be a violation of federal privacy laws, including but not limited to provisions within the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Furthermore, while HIPAA is a United States federal law, the ethical principles that underlie it extend to patients seen outside the country as well.
- b. Sensitive information such as medical records or proprietary information is never to be transmitted by social media.

Professionalism

- c. Professional conduct [<http://asp.med.wayne.edu/professionalism.php#Overview>] must be adhered to at all times, including during the use of social media. The public holds physicians and biomedical research scientists to a high standard of professional conduct.

- d. When writing online as representatives of the SOM about experiences as health professionals, biomedical researchers, or associates of the SOM - medical and graduate students must reveal any existing conflicts of interest and be honest about their credentials.
- e. SOM medical and graduate students may not use their professional position to develop personal relationships with patients, whether online or in person. SOM medical and graduate students are discouraged from interacting with current or past patients on personal social networking sites such as Facebook.
- f. SOM medical and graduate students who do not maintain the school's professional code of conduct are subject to disciplinary action. The SOM reserves the right to ask SOM medical and graduate students to edit, modify, review or delete any posting that violates the school's professional code of conduct. SOM medical and graduate students assume all risks related to the security, privacy and confidentiality of their posts.

Copyright

- g. Wayne State University or SOM logos, trademarks, images, or related representations may not be used publicly unless granted permission in writing from the Executive Director, Office of Marketing and Publications, Wayne State University. Furthermore, original or modified lecture/laboratory material may not be shared outside of the Wayne State University SOM community.

GUIDELINES:

- a. SOM medical and graduate students should recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations and those of their colleagues at the SOM among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical, teaching, and/or research careers, and could undermine public trust in the medical and biomedical research professions. One should always remember that he or she is representing the medical and biomedical research communities.
- b. To maintain appropriate professional boundaries, SOM medical and graduate students should consider separating personal and professional content online. For professional use, SOM medical and graduate students are strongly encouraged to use their med.wayne.edu email addresses. The med.wayne.edu email address is required for all communication with the SOM.
- c. When using the Internet for social networking, SOM medical and graduate students should use the maximum privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content, but should realize that privacy settings are not absolute and that once on the Internet, content is likely there permanently. Thus, SOM medical and graduate students should routinely monitor their own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites and content posted about them by others is accurate and appropriate. One should assume that everything he or she writes, exchanges or receives on a social media site is public.

- d. SOM medical and graduate students acting in a public capacity are an ambassador of the SOM while in that capacity. Controversial subjects should be discussed thoughtfully, respectfully, and in a professional manner.
- e. SOM medical and graduate students should take caution not to post information that is ambiguous or that could be misconstrued or taken out of context.
- f. SOM medical and graduate students should be aware that content posted in any format (*e.g.*, video, song, and etc.) may be taken out of context by others and used for an unintended purpose. Posting online is public and permanent and can be used by anyone without prior request to the original posters. Always consider how people outside of your target group will review the content.
- h. SOM medical and graduate students are encouraged to avoid posting material on school group sites that could be seen as marginalizing to any individual or group; for example regarding gender, race, religion, social background or sexual orientation.
- i. SOM medical and graduate students are encouraged to avoid posting comments about the health, weight, attitude, or lifestyle choices of SOM faculty members, trainees, academic staff members, and medical and graduate students.
- g. When SOM medical and graduate students see content posted by colleagues that appears unprofessional, they have a responsibility to bring that content to the attention of the individual, so that he or she can remove it and/or take other appropriate actions. If, in the opinion of the observer, the behavior significantly violates professional norms and the individual does not take appropriate action to resolve the situation, the observer should report the matter to the Vice Dean of Medical Education.
- h. SOM medical and graduate students should familiarize themselves with relevant Federal, state, and local laws governing online activities. Any issue of concern on social media (including threats, violence, suicide, slander, cyberbullying, etc.) should be reported immediately to the Wayne State University Police Department (phone #:313 577-2222) and/or SOM administration. When uncertain whether these laws are followed, please refer to a school administrator before posting.

*Adapted from the AMA Policy on Social Media, Opinion 9.124 – Professionalism in the Use of Social Media and “Model Policy Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Social Media and Social Networking in Medical Practice” Federation of State Medical Boards [2012] Retrieved 2015, January 28 from http://library.fsmb.org/grpol_policydocs.html

Modified January 7, 2016