



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

GUIDELINES FOR USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS AND PHYSICIANS-IN-TRAINING

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I. **Overview and rationale**

Weblogs and online social networks such as Facebook and MySpace have become popular communication tools over the past several years. These forums offer unique opportunities for people to interact and keep in contact, and have great potential to augment friendships and professional interactions. As professionals with a unique social contract and obligation, medical students as well as practicing physician must be cognizant of the public nature of these forums and the permanent nature of postings therein. While these sites offer terrific potential to bolster communication with friends and colleagues, they are also a potential forum for lapses of professionalism and professional behavior. These sites may give the impression of privacy, but postings and other data should be considered in the public realm and freely visible by many people. IUSM has adopted the following guidelines to assist students in safely and responsibly using these sites.

II. **Scope**

These guidelines are “best practice guidelines” for medical professionals-in-training at the Indiana University School of Medicine. They apply to all **IUSM students and affiliated residents and fellows** who participate in social networking sites and online weblogs. Students and residents should follow these guidelines whether participating in social networks personally or professionally, or whether they are using personal or IU computing equipment.

III. **Definitions**

- a. **Social networking site**: spaces in the internet where users can create a profile and connect that profile to others (individuals or entities) to create a personal network. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- b. **Weblog**: a website, usually in the form of an online journal, maintained by an individual with regular commentary on any number of subjects. Can incorporate text, audio, video clips, and any other types of media.

IV. **Guidelines for ethical/professional behavior**

a. Professionalism

- i. Postings within social network sites are subject to the same professionalism standards as any other personal interactions. The permanence and written nature of these postings make them even more subject to scrutiny than most other forms of communication. The professionalism description can be found in the [IUSM honor code](#), which is signed by all students, residents, fellows and faculty. Student conduct is also governed by the [IUPUI Student Code of Conduct](#). Students may be subject to disciplinary actions within the school for comments that are either unprofessional or violate patient privacy.
- ii. Statements made by you within online networks will be treated as if you verbally made the statement in a public place.

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- iii. Do not violate copyrighted or trademarked materials. If you post content, photos or other media, you are acknowledging that you own or have the right to use these items.
- iv. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as IUSM student or resident, you are creating perceptions about IUSM by those who have access to your social network profile or weblog. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your position at the school and with IUSM's values and professional standards.
- v. IU logos may not be used on any social media site without the approval of the IUSM Web Manager or the Public Relations Director. Any medically oriented weblogs should contain the disclaimer: "The posts on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the IU School of Medicine's positions, strategies, or opinions."
- vi. Use of these social networking sites or weblogs can have legal ramifications. Comments made regarding care of patients or that portray you or a colleague in an unprofessional manner can be used in court or other disciplinary proceedings (i.e. State Medical Licensing Boards).
- vii. Unprofessional postings by others on your page reflect very poorly on you. Please monitor others' postings on your profile and work to ensure that the content would not be viewed as unprofessional. It may be useful to block postings from individuals who post unprofessional content.
- viii. Students are encouraged to alert colleagues to unprofessional or potentially offensive comments made online to avoid future indiscretions and refer them to this document.
- ix. Keep in mind that statements and photos posted within these sites are potentially viewable by future employers, and even if deleted can be recovered under certain circumstances. Be aware too, that images can be downloaded by and forwarded to others. It is not uncommon for potential employers to search for the social network profiles of potential hires, and there are many examples of people not being offered a job because of findings on social networking sites.
- x. Relationships online with attending physicians, fellows, supervising residents, interns, and other medical students are all governed by the [IU policy against sexual harassment](#). Cyber stalking, requests from those who you supervise to engage in activities outside of work, and inappropriate postings to social networking sites while supervising trainees can all be considered forms of sexual harassment.
- xi. Avoid giving specific medical advice.

b. Privacy

- i. Due to continuous changes in these sites it is advisable to closely monitor the privacy settings of your social network accounts to optimize their privacy and security.
- ii. It is advisable that you set your privacy profile so that only those people whom you provide access may see your personal information and photos.
- iii. Avoid sharing identification numbers on your personal profile. These would include address, telephone numbers, social security, passport numbers or driver's license numbers, birth date, or any other data that could be used to obtain your personal records.
- iv. Others may post photos of you, and may "tag" you in each of the photos. It is your responsibility to make sure that these photos are appropriate and are not embarrassing or professionally compromising. It is wise to "untag" yourself from any photos as a general rule, and to refrain from tagging others unless you have explicit permission from them to do so.
- v. Maintain the privacy of colleagues, doctors, and other IUSM or hospital employees when referring to them in a professional capacity unless they have given their permission for their name or likeness to be used.
- vi. Make sure that you differentiate medical opinions from medical facts. The world of medicine is foreign to many, so readers may take your words at face value. Try to make clear what statements reflect your personal beliefs.

c. Confidentiality

- i. [HIPAA](#) regulations apply to comments made on social networking sites, and violators are subject to the same prosecution as with other HIPAA violations.
- ii. Patient privacy measures taken in any public forum apply to social networking sites as well.
- iii. Online discussions of specific patients should be avoided, even if all identifying information is excluded. It is possible that someone could recognize the patient to which you are referring based upon the context.
- iv. Under no circumstances should photos of patients or photos depicting the body parts of patients be displayed online unless specific written permission to do so has been obtained from the patient. Remember, even if you have permission, such photos may be downloadable and forwarded by others.

d. Patient contact

- i. Interactions with patients within these sites are strongly discouraged. This provides an opportunity for a dual relationship, which can be damaging to the doctor-patient relationship, and can also carry legal consequences.

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- ii. Private patient information obtained on a social networking site should not be entered in the patient's medical record without the patient's knowledge and consent.

e. Social media in clinical settings

- i. Be aware of social networking policies in each of IUSM's affiliated hospitals.
 - 1. [Clarian Health policy](#)
 - 2. Wishard Hospital- in development
 - 3. Roudebush VA
 - 4. Ball Memorial Hospital
- ii. Refrain from accessing personal social networking sites while at work or in clinical work areas.