

Guidelines for Appropriate Use of Social Networking Websites

Social networking website such as Facebook and MySpace provide unique opportunities for colleagues to get to know each other, share experiences, and keep contact. As with any public forum, it is important that users of these sites are aware of the risks of using these sites and act in a manner that does not embarrass them or their employer and that does not make patient information publicly available. The Department of Internal Medicine has adopted the following guidelines to assist housestaff in safely using these sites.

Personal Privacy

- We recommend setting your profiles on social networking sites so that only those individuals whom you have provided access may see your personal information.
- We recommend “untagging” yourself in photos that are posted to these sites by other individuals, especially if these photos depict you in what may be construed as compromising situations.
- Consider having a personal page for your friends and a professional page for colleagues to use; inform those people with access to your professional page that this is not a forum for “personal” photos or comments.
- Be sure you are aware of the security and privacy options available to you at any sites where you post personal information.

Protection of Patient Information

- Comments made on social networking sites should be considered the same as if they were made in a public place in the hospital (i.e. cafeteria, elevator, nurse’s station). This being said, we recommend only using these sites in private areas such as the resident’s room, etc and avoiding using these sites at the nurses station and other public areas
- HIPAA rules apply online, and housestaff may be held criminally liable for comments that violate HIPAA.
- Remember that simply removing the name of a patient does not make them anonymous. Family members or friends of that patient or of other patients you are caring for may be able to determine to whom you are referring based on the context.

Professionalism

- Use of these sites 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.
- We recommend using discretion when choosing to log onto a social networking site at work. By no means should using these sites ever postpone or delay patient care needs (i.e. procedures, admissions, nurse calls).
 - I would NOT recommend it all while at work..there are 88 other non-working hours to get on to the site..

- Statements made under your profile are attributable to you and are treated as if you verbally made that statement in a public place.
- Keep in mind that photographs and statements made are potentially viewable by future employers and fellowships.
- We encourage housestaff to feel empowered to alert colleagues to unprofessional or potentially offensive comments made online to avoid future indiscretions.
- Housestaff may be subject to disciplinary actions within the department for comments that are either unprofessional or violate patient privacy.
- We discourage providing patients with access to your site.
- Relationships online with attending physicians, fellows, supervising residents, and medical students are all governed by the OSUMC policy on sexual harassment and relationships among staff members.
- Recall that you are representing OSU and specifically, your residency program, when you log on to a site and make a comment or post a photograph.