

JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

POLICY AND GUIDELINES REGARDING SOCIAL NETWORKING

November 20, 2020

Social Networking Policy and Guidelines for Medical Students, Including Residents and Fellows

Background

The Internet has created the ability for medical students and physicians to communicate and share information quickly and reach millions of people easily. Social networking sites can be an effective way to support personal expression, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the medical profession, provide opportunities to disseminate public health messages and other health communication, bolster an organization's education, outreach, and marketing strategies, and more. At the same time, social networking and other forms of online communication also create new challenges to the patient-physician relationship and create vulnerabilities and potential legal liabilities for individuals and institutions, especially those in the healthcare environment. The widespread reach, accessibility, and permanency of the Internet can also be a liability. The potential impact on one's image and the institution's image is an important consideration. As professionals, medical students and physicians must uphold the integrity of their profession in all aspects of their lives, including communicating via social networking sites.

Definitions

Social networking is an online platform which people use to build social networks or social relationships with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, digital photos and videos, posts, and to inform others about online or real-world activities and events with people in their network. (Wikipedia, Social networking service, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking_service (as of July 14, 2020)).

Social media includes text, images, audio, and video communication via tools such as:

- Blogs and micro-blogs;
- Social networks;
- Professional networking sites;
- Profession-based social networks;
- Video sharing;
- Audio sharing;
- Photo sharing;
- Public comment sections on websites (such as those for online news sites);
- User-created web pages; and
- Any other Internet-based social media application similar in purpose or function to those applications described above.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to communicate JABSOM's policy limiting the use of social media by students, identify institutional policies that apply to the use of social media, and to identify other relevant institutional policies.

Policy Statement

JABSOM understands that students* (*including residents and fellows in a JABSOM Graduate Medical Education (GME) Program) might want to use social networking to create, maintain, or contribute to weblogs, social networking sites, or otherwise post information on the Internet. While JABSOM respects rights to personal expression, such activity must be done on non-work/non-curricular time unless expressly authorized by a supervisor or a JABSOM official with appropriate authority pursuant to the student's training.

JABSOM upholds a professional atmosphere free from all forms of harassment, breach of privacy, and exploitation. Privacy and confidentiality are crucial to the success of medical student training and patient-physician relationships. Everyone must be treated with professionalism and fairness, which includes professional verbal, written, and electronic communication. All healthcare providers have a responsibility to preserve the privacy and security of patients and colleagues under HIPAA.

Violations to any of the above stated policies may result in disciplinary action by JABSOM and/or the GME Program, including but not limited to notice, warning, probation, suspension, non-credit, non-reappointment, or dismissal, and may also involve government investigation or prosecution for HIPAA violations.

Guidelines

1. **Know and obey institutional policies and laws on professionalism and privacy.** Students are prohibited from posting any information on websites or social media sites that is confidential under applicable university policies and the law, including but not limited to protected health information, individually identifiable health information, and private addresses and phone numbers of faculty. Protected health information includes any individually identifiable health information as defined in HIPAA, such as images, videos, audio recordings, names, addresses, phone numbers, medical record numbers, and other information or personal data with respect to which there is a reasonable basis to believe the information can be used to identify the patient. In all cases, University of Hawaii Policies related to Information Security, Data Governance, and the UH Systemwide Student Conduct Code shall apply and supersede this JABSOM policy if there is discrepancy. <https://www.hawaii.edu/infosec/policies/>
2. **Think twice before posting.** Privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Consider what could happen if a post becomes widely known and how that may reflect on both you and JABSOM. Search engines can turn up posts years after they are created, and comments can be forwarded or copied. If you would not say it at a conference or to a member of the media, do not post it. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, seek advice from your supervisor, academic advisor, residency program director, the department chair, the designated institutional official, or the associate dean of academic affairs.
3. **Anonymity is a myth.** Write everything as if you are signing it with your name.

4. **Remember your audience.** A presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective and current students, current employers and colleagues, patients and their families and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.
5. **Strive for accuracy.** Get the facts straight before posting them on social media. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. Posting inaccurate information may place the individual and/or the Institution at legal risk.
6. **Familiarize yourself with and use conservative privacy settings regardless of the content on your profile.** Individuals with social networking pages are responsible for, and must use and monitor regularly, appropriate privacy settings. Practice restraint when disclosing personal information on social networking sites; your audience is everyone.
7. **Consider your professional image.** As a rule, post online only content that you would be comfortable having your department chair, program director, or supervisor see. Always consider the professional image you wish to present to your future or current supervisor, employer, coworkers, patients, and their families. Even seemingly innocuous images and comments can diminish the respect and trust that others have for you.
8. **Do not “friend” patients on social networking sites.** Students must take great care to avoid “friending” patients, or accept a “friend request” from patients. If it is later discovered that a social media friend is a current or former patient, the student should “unfriend” that person. A patient’s profile should not be looked at. Students must not misrepresent themselves using false names/personas, etc. Medical advice is never to be given on social networking sites.
9. **Supervisors are discouraged from engaging in social media interactions with their subordinates, even if a subordinate initiates contact.** JABSOM discourages such interactions involving students because of the potential for misunderstandings and undesirable effects on supervisory relationships. Official communications between students and supervisors should be through email, phone call or in-person meetings.
10. **Ask permission before posting medically-related content on social media sites.** Students must ask for permission from their supervisor or someone with appropriate authority in their program.
11. **If in doubt, do not post!**
12. **Do not represent JABSOM or other affiliated institutions.** Students must not purport to represent JABSOM, the GME Program, or any of the affiliated hospitals or clinical learning sites.

13. **Use disclaimers, but know they are not failsafe.** If students can even be known or presumed to be affiliated with JABSOM, the GME Program, or any of the affiliated hospitals or clinical learning sites, students must include disclaimers in online communications that show clearly the student is not speaking officially on behalf of JABSOM or these entities. For example:
- a. “The postings on this site are my own and do not represent the positions, strategies, or opinions of my employer or the University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine”;
or
 - b. “This is a personal website, produced on my own time and solely reflecting my personal opinions. Statements on this site do not represent the views or policies of my employer, past or present, or any other organization with which I may be affiliated. All content is copyrighted.”
14. **Cyberbullying is strictly prohibited. Do not harass, libel, slander, or embarrass anyone.** Do not post material that is obscene, defamatory, libelous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful, or embarrassing to another person or entity. Individuals may be held personally liable for defamatory, proprietary, or libelous commentary. As with in-person interactions with colleagues, staff, supervisors and patients, posting of offensive comments to social networking sites is considered unprofessional behavior. Such actions include the use of profanity, sexual comments or images, racial slurs, gender specific comments, inappropriate comments that might reasonably offend someone on the basis of his/her race, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, national origin, disability, or other protected category. In addition, students, faculty and staff may not post comments that violate the “Code of Conduct and Sanctions” policy. Students, faculty and staff must also avoid social networking groups with explicit sexual content that may compromise patient-physician relationships.
15. **Disclose your relationship.** If you make comments that could reasonably be construed to be an endorsement of JABSOM’s services, disclose your relationship with JABSOM.
16. **Your online activity may be monitored.** As information posted to the Internet is public, JABSOM and/or the GME Program may monitor social networking sites at any time to maintain integrity, functionality, and security of JABSOM and/or the GME Program’s electronic/media resources and to ensure professionalism is maintained.

Relevant Institutional Policies

Adhere to the rules that apply to all other aspects of your responsibilities as a JABSOM student, including professionalism and integrity, confidentiality, privacy and security. The University of Hawaii is a public institution and JABSOM students are expected to uphold their commitment to safeguard and preserve state resources. Relevant institutional policies include, but are not limited to, the following listed policies and any subsequent revisions. Students are responsible for being knowledgeable about current institutional policies.

Current Institutional Policies:

- [University of Hawaii](#) – Systemwide Policies
- [JABSOM](#) – GME Program Policies

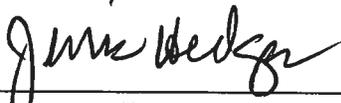
Professionalism and Integrity

- JABSOM Policy – Appropriate Appearance and Attire
- JABSOM Policy – Interactions with Industry
- UH Executive Policy EP7.205 – Systemwide Student Disciplinary Sanctions
- UH Executive Policy EP7.208 – Systemwide Student Conduct Code
- UH Executive Policy EP12.214 – Conflicts of Interest and Commitment

Confidentiality, Privacy, and Security

- GME Policy - HIPAA
- JABSOM Policy – HIPAA
- JABSOM Policy – Public Computer Use
- UH Executive Policy EP2.210 – Use and Management of Information Security Resources
- UH Executive Policy EP2.214 – Institutional Data Security Classification Categories and Information Security Guidelines
- UH Executive Policy EP2.215 – Institutional Data Governance
- UH Executive Policy EP2.217 – HIPAA Policy

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