



HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE

FACULTY OF MEDICINE

GUIDELINES FOR USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

- I. Overview
- II. Scope
- III. Definitions
- IV. Guidelines
- V. Implementation
- VI. References

I. OVERVIEW

Online social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Myspace etc. have taken on increasing importance in both personal and professional life. These social media offer unique opportunities for people to interact and build relationships and have great potential to enhance interpersonal and professional communication. At the same time, these social media open new risks associated with inappropriate use which must be addressed through professionalism, training, guidelines, and appropriate corrective action when necessary. Medical students must be made aware of the public nature of social media and the permanent nature of its content.

Health professionals including medical students may not be aware of how online posting can reflect negatively on medical professionalism or jeopardize their careers. (Chretien KC, et al. Online posting of unprofessional content by medical students. *JAMA*. 2009).

Research shows that use of social media websites by the medical profession is common and growing. Results of a national survey has shown that in the Patient-Doctor relationship and online social networks : medical students hits the survey with a rating of 94%. (Bosslet GT, et al. The patient-doctor relationship and online social networks: results of a national survey. *J Gen Intern Med* 2011).

Several cases of questionable behavior has been noted from the medical students, using social networks which violates the professional ethical guidelines. Many medical schools have adopted guidelines to regulate medical students' use of social media in relation to medical profession and health care practice. This document has been prepared to address these issues.

II. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to all medical students of the Faculty of Medicine in the Health Sciences Centre (HSC), Kuwait University and all those who utilize the Faculty of Medicine facilities, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, who participate in social networking sites and online weblogs. Medical students and all those who utilize the Faculty of Medicine facilities should follow these guidelines whether participating in social networks personally or professionally, or whether they are using personal or HSC 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, Twitter etc.
- 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

a. Considerations when using social media

1. Conduct yourself online as you would be in public places. Your online identity is a projection of your own behavior, and thus it is important to maintain professionalism.

2. Maintain the confidentiality of patients. Do not discuss clinical encounters openly online.
3. Avoid posting of clinical encounters online. This is also a breach of confidentiality. Whenever taking a photo of a patient, always ask the permission from the patient and the attending physician to ensure that you are within your rights as a medical student and document this permission.
4. Treat your colleagues with respect. Students should refrain from criticizing specific colleagues or health professionals online. If you feel as though you have been mistreated, you are advised to follow the formal process for addressing such matters.
5. Harassment and discrimination remain unacceptable in professional and educational communities.
6. Behave online with the belief that there will be a permanent record of your actions.

b. Professionalism

The same professionalism principles and policies that apply to medical students in person apply to them online also. Medical students have a responsibility to help maintain public trust and confidence in their future profession.

Students will be subjected to disciplinary actions within the school for comments that are either unprofessional, violate patient privacy or institutional discipline.

- i. Statements made by a student within online networks will be treated as if the student verbally made the statement in a public place.

- ii. 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.
- iii. Unprofessional postings by others on your page reflect very poorly on you. 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.
- iv. Students are encouraged to alert colleagues to unprofessional or potentially offensive comments made online to avoid future indiscretions and refer them to this document.
- v. Students should refrain from posts that use institutional intellectual property, copyrights or trademarks (e.g. HSC crest or hospital logo) without explicit written permission.
- vi. Students should not post lecture notes without written consent of the concerned staff.
- vii. Do not post images of animal experiments held in Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University in the social media.
- viii. Students should not photograph and post the human body, in full or part in and around the vicinity of the Dissecting Room. No activity held in the Dissecting Room should be photographed and posted on the social media.

c. Privacy

Social media sites cannot guarantee confidentiality whatever privacy settings are in place. Medical students are responsible for all content published in their name or in pseudonym on social media. It is

crucial to note that there is no such thing as a private social media network.

- i. 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, student identification number of the faculty, civil numbers, passport numbers or driver's license numbers, birth date, or any other data that could be used to obtain your personal records.
- iv. Monitor others who 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 Faculty staff when referring to them in a professional capacity unless they have given their permission for their name or likeness to be used.
- vi. Medical students must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among their doctors, patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

- vii. Regularly search using one's name, a vanity search (eg. Google search) to identify newly published content which can be professionally inappropriate under the students names in the website.

d. Confidentiality

The publication of private patient information in social media online is a breach of confidentiality.

- i. 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.
- ii. 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.
- iii. Consent obtained for educational purposes does not extend to consent for public dissemination and such publication would cross a clear red line

e. Social media in educational and clinical settings

Refrain from accessing personal social networking sites while at faculty educational sessions or in clinical work areas.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

All medical students shall be made aware of this policy. The policy guidelines will be posted in the official HSC website so that its accessible to all. Moreover , at the time of students enrollment and

registration, a printed copy of the guidelines will be available in Students Affairs Office and at the medical students association (KUMSA) office for their reference. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action to be taken by the administrative affairs as per Faculty and University disciplinary rules and regulations.

VI. REFERENCES

1. General Medical Council (2013) Doctor's use of social media London, GMC
2. McGill Faculty of Medicine. Guidelines for medical students in the public forum. Montreal: McGill University; 2011
3. Guidelines for the appropriate use of social media and social networking in medical practice. Rhode Island, Department of Health; 2013
4. IUSM Guidelines for online social networking. Indiana University, School of Medicine
5. Social networking and the medical practice, Guidelines for physician, office staff and patients; Ohio State Medical Association; 2010
6. Using social media: practical and ethical guidance for doctors and medical students. British Medical Association
7. CFMS guide to Medical Professionalism : Recommendations for social media. CFMS 2013
8. Professionalism in the Use of Social Media by John W. McMahon Sr., MD, Chair