University of Illinois College of Medicine

Social Media Guidelines

Information:

The following guidelines apply to all students of the University of Illinois - College of Medicine and cover all interaction with social media and other publicly accessible online communications. The terms social media, social web and social networks comprise Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information based on user participation and user-generated content. Examples include social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, social bookmarking sites like Del.icio.us, social news sites like Digg, Twitter, YouTube and other sites that are centered on user interaction. Social media content may take the form of blogs, social networks, social news, wikis, videos and podcasts and other forms of on-line publishing, including newsgroups and e-mail distribution lists.

These guidelines are informed by the American Medical Association Policy: Professionalism in the Use of Social Media, which is included as an appendix to this document.

Overview:

The University of Illinois College of Medicine, relies not only on the strong formal competencies of its students but also on the trust and support of the communities it serves. While we encourage open communication both internally and externally in all forms, we expect that such communication does not substantially interfere with our enterprise, our clinical affiliates’ enterprises, or violates our patients’, faculty’s, staff’s, or students’ privacy and trust. Personal communications accessible by third parties that contains personal health information (PHI) about patients, are always prohibited, and may support grounds for immediate action in accordance with UICOM policy, as well as federal, state and local regulations.

Only UICOM employees acting within their official capacities or students authorized by the medical school administration may use social media to portray themselves as representing UICOM or to conduct official business in the name of UICOM or one of its units. Use of any social media in to conduct UICOM business must be approved by UICOM administration (typically, the college or regional dean or designee). Logos for UICOM, the University of Illinois at Chicago or the University of Illinois may not be used on any social media site without the express written approval of the UICOM Office of Publications or equivalent regional campus office.
Best Practices:

Postings within social network sites are subject to the same professionalism standards as any other personal interactions or public behavior. Therefore, UICOM recommends the following best practices for its students:

1. Routinely monitor your own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on your own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about you, is accurate, and consistent with UICOM student policies [LINK] as well as the professionalism standards for students as presented in the UICOM Student Academic Promotions Policies document [LINK].

2. Take steps to ensure implementation of appropriate privacy settings to avoid inadvertent dissemination of personal information to audiences outside your control.

3. Be responsible for the content you publish on-line, and be aware that information posted on user-generated media can never truly be erased or deleted, and may be accessed by third parties, including the University, other students, patients, and future employers.

4. Unless specifically authorized to do so, you should not represent yourself as speaking on behalf of UICOM in any communications within social media forums. When referencing an association with UI-COM in on-line communications, you should take care to write or speak in the first person and make clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of UICOM.

5. Be aware of and comply with legal standards governing patient confidentiality — including HIPAA and other applicable laws and policies. You should avoid communicating about patients in a manner that could in any way convey a patient’s identity, even accidentally. Patients with rare diagnoses, unusual physical appearances and/or in specific locations within the community may be easily identifiable even in the absence of names and medical record numbers.

6. You should not disclose UICOM’s confidential or other proprietary information to any third party.

7. Avoid making comments that may be considered defamatory, unlawful harassment, obscene or may pose a “true threat” or incite imminent lawless action, as those terms are defined by law.

8. Ensure that all communications in social media forums comply with applicable UICOM policies regarding privacy and confidentiality of student records. [LINK to policies]

9. Respect copyright, trademarks and other intellectual property rights of others.

10. Notify UICOM administration when you become aware of postings by or about you that appear inconsistent with these guidelines, so that appropriate action may be taken.
11. Remember that, when engaging in social media communications, the UICOM expects that you will comply with the UICOM standards of professional conduct, and that violating those standards may result in sanctions up to and including dismissal from UICOM.

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact the Office of Student Affairs at Chicago: 312-996-2450; Peoria: 309-671-8411; Rockford: 815-395-5630; Urbana: 217-333-8146.

Appendix

The American Medical Association adopted the following policy on Nov. 8, 2010

AMA Policy: Professionalism in the Use of Social Media

The Internet has created the ability for medical students and physicians to communicate and share information quickly and to reach millions of people easily. Participating in social networking and other similar Internet opportunities can support physicians’ personal expression, enable individual physicians to have a professional presence online, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the profession, provide opportunity to widely disseminate public health messages and other health communication. Social networks, blogs, and other forms of communication online also create new challenges to the patient-physician relationship. Physicians should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:

(a) Physicians should be cognizant of standards of patient privacy and confidentiality that must be maintained in all environments, including online, and must refrain from posting identifiable patient information online.

(b) When using the Internet for social networking, physicians should use privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content to the extent possible, but should realize that privacy settings are not absolute and that once on the Internet, content is likely there permanently. Thus, physicians should routinely monitor their own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about them by others, is accurate and appropriate.
(c) If they interact with patients on the Internet, physicians must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-physician relationship in accordance with professional ethical guidelines just, as they would in any other context.

(d) To maintain appropriate professional boundaries physicians should consider separating personal and professional content online.

(e) When physicians 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 the behavior significantly violates professional norms and the individual does not take appropriate action to resolve the situation, the physician should report the matter to appropriate authorities.

(f) Physicians must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers (particularly for physicians-in-training and medical students), and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

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