

UC Davis School of Medicine Social Media Guidelines

Internal social media guidelines for medical students who use social media for educational purposes, personal interests, and professional development.

I. Introduction

The appropriate use of digital technology by students in medical education will serve to promote academic success in students and prepare them for successful careers in medicine. An important component to digital technology commonly used is social media. Broadly speaking, social media are powerful communication tools with the potential to have significant personal and professional influence. Given this potential, the UC Davis School of Medicine has drafted the following guidelines to help clarify how best to enhance and protect students' personal and professional interests when participating in social media. These guidelines are meant to serve as a guide for users of all current and future social media venues.

Both in professional and institutional roles, students should follow the same, if not better, behavioral standards online as they would in life. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines apply online as in the real world.

II. Background

Digital technology and social networking offer significant opportunities for enhancing medical education in the form of online modules, audience response systems, rapid access to medical resources, etc. Many assume that the presence of technology will enhance instructor teaching as well as student learning and achievement. When integrated into the curriculum, digital technology can be valuable in educating students. Unfortunately, the money and time spent using technology and social media can easily be wasted (National Research Council 2000). When improperly applied, these same tools disrupt the learning environment in a variety of ways, including distractions to self and peers (Fried 2008), breaches in patient confidentiality, and inappropriate use of intellectual property. Most concerning is the implication to the development of medical student professionalism and the role of the educational institution, faculty, and staff (Goldstein et al 2006). Schools with digital technology and social media policies are more likely to effectively address these issues (Chretien et al 2009).

III. Purpose

The aims of these guidelines are the following:

1. To identify your responsibilities to the UC Davis School of Medicine in relation to social media and to help you represent yourself and the school in a responsible and professional manner.
2. To further identify the responsibilities of students to maximize the educational value of technology and to outline its acceptable use as they apply to social media in the setting of medical education.
3. The UC Davis School of Medicine believes that participation in online communities is a valuable means of sharing and communicating. These guidelines are not intended to restrict the flow of useful and appropriate information.

IV. General Information

1. **Scope:** These guidelines apply to students of the UC Davis School of Medicine. They are relevant to the use of social media during and outside of classroom and clinical time, when the individual's affiliation with the school is identified, known or presumed.
2. **Definitions:**
 - a. **Social media:** Media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. In the School of Medicine, postings and discussions on student-run class websites and school-sponsored Sakai websites also fall in this category.
 - b. **Professionalism:** Expectation of medical professionals to demonstrate altruism, humanism, cultural competence, accountability, and ethical-legal understanding.
 - c. **E-Professionalism (Electronic Professionalism):** Attitudes and behaviors reflecting traditional professionalism principles and models but manifested through digital media.
 - d. **Social Networking:** Includes postings and/or interaction on the internet, including, but not limited to, social networking sites, (e.g., Facebook®, MySpace®, LinkedIn®), blogs and other online journals, discussion boards and chat rooms, microblogs (e.g., Twitter®), third party rating sites (e.g., Yelp®), smartphone applications, and multimedia sites (e.g., YouTube®, Flickr®).
 - e. **Protected Health Information:** Any individually identifiable information regarding a patient or affiliated clinical training sites that is collected, received, created, transmitted, or maintained in connection with an individual's status as a patient. This includes information about a patient's physical or mental health, patient records, and other personal identifiers or similar information.
 - f. **UC Davis School of Medicine Hosted Media Sites:** Any internet or intranet site sanctioned or endorsed by the UC Davis School of Medicine.
 - g. **Non-Hosted Media:** Any internet site not sanctioned and/or endorsed by or branded as part of the UC Davis School of Medicine; may include personal social networking sites.
 - h. **Wiki:** Allows users to create, edit, and link web pages easily; often used to create collaborative, community-driven websites (called "Wikis") and to populate community and student-run class websites.
3. **No Retaliation:** There will be no retaliation against individuals who raise good faith concerns about actual or potential violations of these guidelines.

V. Guidelines

The following guidelines outline appropriate standards of conduct related to all electronic information (text, image, or auditory) and social media that is created or posted externally on social media sites by students at the UC Davis School of Medicine. It applies to postings on: UC Davis School of Medicine hosted sites; social media in which one's affiliation is known, identified, or presumed; or a self-hosted site, where the views and opinions expressed are not intended to represent the official views of the UC Davis School of Medicine.

1. **Take Responsibility and Use Good Judgment.** You are responsible for the material that you post online. Be courteous, respectful, and thoughtful about how

- others may perceive or be affected by postings. Understand that content contributed to a social media site could encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. Responses should be considered carefully in light of how they would reflect on the poster and/or university. Inaccurate, inappropriate, threatening, harassing, or poorly worded postings may be harmful to others. They may damage relationships, undermine the UC Davis School of Medicine reputation, discourage teamwork, and negatively impact the institution's commitment to patient care, education, research, and community service.
2. **Think Before You Post.** Anything you post is highly likely to be permanently connected to you and your reputation through the Internet. Search engines can turn up posts years after they are created, and comments can be forwarded or copied. Future residency directors and employers can often access this information and may use it to evaluate you. Consider what could happen if a post becomes widely known and how that may reflect on you and the School of Medicine. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, ask a faculty mentor, ombudsperson, administrator, or the Professionalism Improvement Committee.
 3. **Protect Confidentiality and Privacy.** Do not post confidential information about the UC Davis School of Medicine, patients, students, faculty, or staff. Adhere to all applicable university privacy and confidentiality policies, such as HIPAA. Even if an individual is not identified by name, if there is a reasonable basis to believe that the person could still be identified from that information, then its use or disclosure could constitute a violation of HIPAA. Additionally, online activities regarding patients that may compromise a patient's personal dignity or otherwise make them question the confidentiality of services provided are prohibited. Disclosing information about patients without written permission, including photographs or potentially identifiable information, is strictly prohibited. These rules also apply to deceased patients and to posts in the secure section of your Facebook page that is accessible by approved friends only. Those who share confidential or proprietary information do so at the risk of disciplinary action.
 4. **Protect the Security of Yourself and Others:** Activities that compromise security are those that make you personally vulnerable (such as disclosure of your location). It is important to be aware of one's vulnerability and discoverability on the Internet and in the public domain. For example, posting a photo of oneself on vacation may make one's home vulnerable to theft. Photos can be traced to a place and time and it is important to be aware of not only the liability that this can cause in a patient care setting, but also the threat to safety and security that it poses in a more personal setting.
 5. **Respect Work and Educational Commitments.** Respect university and educational time and property. Ensure that your blogging, social networking, and other external media activities do not interfere with your work or educational commitments. You should limit participation in social media activities during classroom or clinical time unless required; incidental use occurring during breaks or in a manner that is consistent with other general internet use is not prohibited by these guidelines.
 6. **Identify Yourself and Use a Disclaimer.** If you communicate in social media about the UC Davis School of Medicine, disclose your connection with the School of Medicine and your role. If you identify your affiliation to the UC Davis School of Medicine online, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the institution and that you are speaking for yourself. A

disclaimer, such as, "The views expressed on this [blog; website] are my own and do not reflect the views of my school/employer," may be appropriate.

7. **Respect Copyright and Fair Use Laws.** For UC Davis School of Medicine's protection as well as your own, it is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. Do not use the UC Davis School of Medicine logos or any other university images, iconography, trademarks, or proprietary graphics on personal social media sites that would create the appearance you are speaking on behalf of the UC Davis School of Medicine.
8. **Protect Proprietary Information.** Do not share confidential or proprietary information that may compromise the UC Davis School of Medicine's business practices or security. Similarly, do not share information in violation of any laws or regulations.
9. **Remember your audience.** Be aware that a presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public at large. This includes prospective students, current students, current employers and colleagues, and peers. In addition, be aware of the presence of patients as a potential audience. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.
10. **Photography:** Photographs posted on social media sites easily can be accessed by visitors. Consider how photographs of you may represent UC Davis School of Medicine.
11. **Failure to abide by the UC Davis School of Medicine social media guidelines may lead to disciplinary or remedial action.** Those who become aware of information considered to be inappropriate or in violation of these guidelines from a variety of sources are encouraged to contact a supervisor, faculty, administrator, or Professionalism Improvement Committee. Because it is not the UC Davis School of Medicine's intention to regulate protected off-duty conduct, the Professionalism Improvement Committee or administrators should be consulted before taking any adverse action.

VI. Case Examples

The following are fictional case examples of social media activities and an explanation of their appropriateness as per the UC Davis School of Medicine Social Media Guidelines:

1. **A patient attempts to "friend" a medical student on Facebook.** This is almost always inappropriate, unless the student-patient relationship has ended. Even after the relationship has ended, it would be inappropriate to discuss health-related information. Prior to establishing an online relationship with a patient through social networking sites, consider potential conflict of interest issues, given the unique association between patients and health care providers.
2. **A medical student tweets that he just finished rounds with the residents on a patient and describes the clinical findings of that patient.**
 - a. A **high risk post** would include information that is identifiable to a certain patient which includes their name, location, the clinical rotation, the date and time, and clinical findings that may be unique to the patient or unique to a rare disease that may identify the patient. These details can lead to breaches in confidentiality not only by viewers but by people who may be intentionally trying to find information about patients. For example, "I just saw my first case of lupus on internal medicine rounds! A 24 year old African American

woman presenting with classic signs and symptoms of x, y, and z. -at Location A and Date/Time B."

- b. A **low risk post** would not allude to a certain patient but rather discuss medical findings in a general context. Details such as location, date, and time would not be disclosed. For example, "I learned today that presenting symptoms of lupus can include x, y, and z."
3. **A third year medical student writes in her Facebook page, naming an attending physician who did minimal teaching on rounds and recommending that other students not take clinical electives with that physician.** Legitimate critique of an educational activity is appropriate, so long as professionalism is maintained. There are more effective and less public mechanisms for relaying this type of information such as through evaluations or feedback to the course instructor of record.
4. **A student posts a picture of a baby who was just discharged from the service on which they are rotating, expressing joy, best wishes to the family, and congratulating everyone involved in this excellent patient outcome.** Without written patient/representative consent, this is a clear violation of patient confidentiality, even if the patient is not named.
5. **A medical student wearing a UC Davis School of Medicine t-shirt is tagged in a photo taken at a local bar and posted on a friend's Facebook page. The medical student is clearly intoxicated.** The two issues are that: (1) the UC Davis School of Medicine logo identifies the affiliation to the institution; and (2) the unprofessional behavior of the student is available for all to see, including future employers and patients. The medical student did not post the photo, but should try to remove the photo and the tagging link to the student's own Facebook page.
6. **A medical student creates a social media website to discuss medical knowledge (e.g., "Cardiology Interest Group" on Facebook®)** This is a learning community environment, in which medical knowledge is exchanged, shared, and discussed. While the goal is laudable, there are still risks. A disclaimer is necessary, since postings may be incorrect, taken out of context, or improperly referenced. The moderator should take precautions to prevent the posting of information or photographs that are potentially identifiable to a particular patient.

VII. References

These guidelines have been modified from the following social media guidelines:

1. Mount Sinai Health System Social Media Guideline
2. University of Louisville Health System
3. Kaiser Health System
4. Sutter Health System

VIII. Bibliography

1. Fried, CB. "In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning." *Computers and Education*, 2008, 50(3), 906-914.
2. Kaczmarczyk JM et al. "E-professionalism: a new frontier in medical education." *Teaching and Learning in Medicine: An International Journal*, 25:2, 5-170.
3. National Research Council. *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000.