
10 THINGS ABOUT: SOCIAL MEDIA

1. The way patients seek out healthcare information and physicians has changed. Many psychiatrists are recognizing that in order to be found by prospective patients, they need an online presence and are exploring options for achieving this.
2. At this juncture, we do not know all of the liability issues that may arise from use of the Internet and how this will play out in the courts. At a minimum, we can assume that risks will be the same as they are for activities conducted off-line. Technology does not change the obligation to meet clinical, legal, and ethical standards.
3. The Internet does not change your duty to maintain boundaries with your patients and you should never interact with them on personal social media sites. If a patient attempts to contact you via a social media site, you should make it clear to them that you do not communicate with patients by these means and will not respond to further attempts at contact.
4. State licensing boards can and have disciplined physicians for inappropriate online behavior. This includes depictions of such things as excessive drinking and suggestive content as well as misrepresentation of credentials.
5. Privacy controls are not an absolute guarantee that your information can't/won't be viewed by those other than you had intended. Once you have posted something, it may be copied and forwarded to others. Never post anything that you would not want a patient, colleague, employer, or licensing board to see.
6. It's a good idea to do a search of yourself using all potential variations of your name to determine what information may be seen by others. Clean up your social media pages and ask friends to remove anything that might cause professional embarrassment.
7. When using a website or social media platform to market your practice, remember that the greater the amount of interactivity allowed between the practice and individuals accessing the site, the greater the risk. Responses to inquiries from non-patients might create a treatment relationship should that person construe your response as medical advice.
8. Physicians should be aware of potential liability risk to their practices through the misuse of social media by employees – both inside and outside the workplace. A comprehensive social media policy (with special emphasis on the need to maintain confidentiality) can help insulate the practice from exposure.

9. Even if you choose not to use social media to advertise your practice, consider establishing a LinkedIn profile which works much like an online CV. An important benefit is that LinkedIn scores very high on Google searches meaning that if someone were to search for you, that result would appear before physician review sites, thus allowing you to control the information a patient first sees about you.

10. The Federation of State Medical Board's (FSMB) *Model Policy Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Social Media and Social Networking in Medical Practice* is an excellent tool for ensuring that you and your staff utilize social media in such a way as ensure professionalism and limit liability exposure.



Call (800) 245-3333
Email TheProgram@prms.com
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