Guidelines for Social Media

Columbia University Medical Center

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These guidelines are for all CUMC faculty, staff, and students and apply to all interactive or "social" media, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+ and websites or blogs, whether for personal or business use. These guidelines apply when CUMC faculty, staff or students post to their own sites or post or comment on other sites.

CUMC policies on professionalism, protection of confidential or proprietary information and use of computers or other University resources, and the prohibition on discrimination and harassment, apply to social media, just as they apply to all other forms of communication.

You need to be especially careful to protect patient privacy and all other confidential information with which we are trusted. Do not post *any* patient information, photographs of patients (and/or cadavers), or commentary about patients on social media sites – even if you think the information is "de-identified" or visible only to a restricted audience.

- You may use your Columbia title for identification purposes, in accordance with the Faculty Handbook. However, if you do, you must make clear that you are not representing Columbia, CUMC or any affiliated institution. For example, "About me," "Profile," or other bio sections should include language such as "My posts represent my personal views and not those of Columbia University."
- Clinicians should consider adding a notice that their posts do not constitute medical advice and that individuals should not post personal information. Clinicians should also be aware that giving medical advice over the internet to a patient in another state may constitute the unlicensed practice of medicine.
- The Columbia name or logos may not be used for commercial purposes. Faculty and staff are prohibited from using their Columbia identification to imply University endorsement.[1]
- Any use of the Columbia name or logos on websites or social media, such as on official department sites, requires the approval of the CUMC Office of Communications, which coordinates social media activity and maintains links to department or other social media

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[1] "The name of the University, its insignias, and the emblems of its schools may not be used to advertise or recommend commercial products and services, to promote the activities of outside organizations, or to further social or political causes. Exceptions require the prior approval of the Provost. These policies also apply to the use of the University name and insignias in any electronic media, including Internet addresses, web sites, and domain names. In connection with their outside activities, faculty and other officers may identify themselves as holding appointments at Columbia by listing their University titles. They should, however, be careful not to imply that the University supports, sponsors, or endorses those activities." See http://www.columbia.edu/cu/vpaa/handbook/obligations.html.

sites from the main CUMC social media pages. Domain names are governed by the University Computing, Network and Information Policies.[2]

- Physicians and clinical staff are cautioned about connecting with ("friending") patients or patient families on social media networks. Use the same judgment as would apply to any other social interactions. Physicians may choose to create a business or professional "fan" page separate from their personal Facebook pages as an alternative.
- All electronic interaction with patients must comply with current CUMC or other applicable privacy and data security policies, including the requirement for the patient's *written* authorization.[3]
- Managers and supervisors are strongly discouraged from initiating and/or accepting connections with employees they manage. Blending professional and personal relationships via social media may create a variety of actual and/or perceived challenges in the workplace and alter individuals' ability to effectively perform their job responsibilities. This also applies to faculty and trainees. Faculty are encouraged to establish their own policy regarding social media connections with students or trainees so that all are treated equally.
- You are responsible for material that you post to the Internet. This means that your posts should accurately reflect your academic, clinical or other expertise. You must take reasonable steps to correct errors and to update material if it becomes outdated.
- Blogs and websites should follow best practices for health information, including clearly identifying authors and reviewers and indicating the date on which the content was last reviewed for accuracy.[4]
- The University's expectation is that employees will not spend excessive time on social media for personal reasons during working hours. Failure to comply with this expectation may result in discipline, up to and including, termination.

Additional References:

- CUMC Privacy and Data Security Information http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/hipaa/
- CU Faculty Handbook http://www.columbia.edu/cu/vpaa/handbook
- "Saving Face: Facebook for Physicians," by William Malamon, available at http://www.tmlt.org/newscenter/features/facebook-for-physicians.html.
- Chretien K. A doctor's request: Please don't 'friend' me. USA Today. June 9, 2010. Available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-06-10-column10_ST1_N.htm. Accessed December 30, 2011.
- Snyder L; American College of Physicians Ethics, Professionalism, and Human Rights Committee. American College of Physicians Ethics Manual. Sixth Edition. Ann Intern Med. 2012;156:73-104. Available at http://www.annals.org/content/156/1_Part_2/73.full. Accessed Jan. 4, 2012.

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[2] See http://www.columbia.edu/cu/policy/domain_names.html. CUMC websites and domain names are managed by the P&S Office of Communications.

[3] "If a patient requests email communications containing their PHI, the individual receiving the request must obtain a completed Request for Email Communications form from the patient AND must provide the patient with the Important Information about Provider/Patient Email form prior to processing the patient's request." See http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/hipaa/policies/authorization.html.

[4] Numerous organizations have promulgated guidelines for health information on the Internet, including the Federation of State Medical Boards, Health on the Net Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- Jain SH. Practicing medicine in the age of Facebook. N Engl J Med. 2009;361:649-51. [PMID: 19675328].
- Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States. Model Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of the Internet in Medical Practice. Dallas: Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States; 2002. Accessed at www.fsmb.org/pdf/2002_grpol_Use_of_Internet.pdf on Jan. 4, 2012.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Healthfinder.gov Quality Guidelines. Updated Jan. 4, 2012. Available at http://healthfinder.gov/aboutus/content_guidelines.aspx. Accessed Jan. 4, 2012.

For more information:

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(212) 305-3900