Geisel Social Media Use Guidelines

Social media has become an important communication tool for physicians in both their personal and professional lives. The profession of medicine serves society-at-large including public communications to promote public health and advocate for policies that promote justice and equity for patients. Medicine also involves issues of confidentiality in the patient-physician relationship. This set of circumstances means that navigating the social media environment in the health professions can pose challenges. Accordingly, these guidelines seek to aid Geisel medical students, as members of the medical profession who may choose to engage on social media platforms to utilize it effectively for advocacy and public health, and to engage in social media in a manner that may benefit and/or positively advance their careers. These guidelines are purely voluntary and do not change or add to the definitions of prohibited conduct or behavioral expectations in existing Geisel and Dartmouth policies. Rather, behavior and communication via social media, like behavior and communication in person and in all other media, is subject to the requirements of those policies. To the extent that students use Dartmouth information technology resources, that use should comply with Dartmouth's Acceptable Use Policy.

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- Provide pointers as suggested by the American Medical Student Association for developing a social media presence as a health professional, should one choose to do so
- Assist medical students in understanding how posted content may help promote their professional development and success and how to avoid posts that may hinder their professional success and career development

As members of the medical community and as students enrolled at the Geisel School of Medicine, students' behavior on social media may be subject to a higher level of scrutiny and may reflect on more than just the intended scope of their personal lives. Students should strive to uphold the professional standards of physicians beyond the classroom, which can be challenging given the widespread access to and use of online platforms. These tools, while useful for interaction around social or political causes and public health concerns, can create professional and ethical dilemmas regarding relationships with peers, patients, patient confidentiality and patient trust in care providers. Social media has the potential to have incredibly positive impacts for medical professionals, including professional networking, sharing new scientific discoveries, bringing attention to advances and successes of one's peers or institution, rapid dissemination of accurate public health messages, and advocacy for vulnerable populations. However, students should remember that online behavior, just like behavior in person or in any other format, can affect their professional reputation and good standing in medical school.

When interacting on social media students are urged to think critically about how they would like to be perceived publicly, or by a broader audience than they may initially anticipate. Asking questions like, “would I want my parents, grandparents, friends, co-workers, school administrators, clinical evaluators, future program directors, patients, etc.to see this?” before posting is a helpful exercise.

Please be aware that due to the nature of the internet, electronic communications, even those you believe to be private or anonymous, are infinitely shareable and could be used in ways you did not intend.

Students should use caution when referencing their experiences in or events associated with patient care and should be knowledgeable about any privacy or social media policies of their associated clinical institutions (i.e., DH, CPMC, VA). In all cases, confidential information or Personal Health Information (PHI) should never be shared on social media and standards of patient privacy and confidentiality and regulations outlined in Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) must be followed.

It is also important to clarify that posts are those of the individual writer and to follow Dartmouth’s policy statement on institutional statements vs. individual statements. The use of the official Dartmouth or Geisel School of Medicine logos as part of online content must be approved by the College in writing prior to any post.

Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center has shared this video to assist employees in decision-making around social media use which you may find helpful.

It is also acceptable to fully decline all participation in social media, noting that social media engagement may have negative consequences on mental, emotional, and physical health

The Social Media Guidelines for Medical Students and Physicians, created by the American Medical Student Association, are the recommended guidelines for social networking. These are reproduced below verbatim for your reference.

- **Be professional.** As medical students and physicians, we should represent our profession well. Always adhere to the rules of ethical and professional conduct.
- **Be responsible**. Carefully consider content and exercise good judgment as anything you post can have immediate and/or long-term consequences and carry the potential for significant public impact and viral spread of content. Therefore, all statements must be understood to be true and not misleading. Make sure that you differentiate opinions from facts.
- **Maintain separation.** Avoid interacting with current or past patients through social media and avoid requests to give medical advice through social media. (e.g. replying to a post on social media asking to be diagnosed)
- **Be transparent/use disclaimers**. Disclose yourself and provide an appropriate disclaimer that distinguishes your views from those of the clinic, hospital system and/or University with which you are associated (while at the same time, being careful not to violate any social media policy to which you may be subject by such organizations).

Without specific direction from the appropriate personnel, you may not present yourself as an official representative or spokesperson for said organizations. Also, be sure to reveal any conflicts of interest and be honest about your credentials as a medical student.

- **Be respectful**. Do not use defamatory, vulgar, libelous, and potentially inflammatory language and do not display language or photographs that imply disrespect for any individual or group because of age, race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, marital status, genetic information, military status, or any other protected characterization or group.
- **Follow copyright laws.** Comply with copyright laws. Make sure you have the right to use material before publishing, including use of Dartmouth College, Geisel School of Medicine, or affiliated institutional logos or brand marks.
- **Protect client/patient information**. Do not discuss confidential information and follow standards of patient privacy and confidentiality and regulations outlined in Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g). Remember you could personally face a HIPAA violation if there are enough details in the post for patients to recognize themselves.
- **Comply with all legal restrictions and obligations**. Remember use of social networking sites or weblogs can carry legal and professional ramifications. Comments made in an unprofessional manner can be used in legal, professional, or other disciplinary proceedings (i.e., hearings before a State Medical Licensing Board).

No institutional practice exists within the Geisel community for active monitoring of individual social media accounts by Geisel staff or administrators. As such, any concerns for the health and safety of Geisel community members noted by others on online platforms should be actively brought to the attention of an appropriate party as outlined below.

If you believe you have seen or read something that you believe may result in harm to an individual or organization, apply the same judgement you would if overhearing or witnessing the event in person. For assistance with identifying or preventing an event that might threaten safety of an individual or might involve damage to Dartmouth's property, please contact Campus Safety and Security at (603) 646-4000.

Helpful Links

Acceptable Use Policy

Professionalism Policy Undergraduate Medical Education Program

Learning Environment Policy and Complaint Review Procedures

Policy on Expectations for Professionalism for Faculty, Non-Faculty Academics, and Staff of the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth