

Doctors and Social Media

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Social networking sites offer new professional opportunities for physicians and medical students. However, misuse of social media may hurt a physician's professional reputation, jeopardize the confidentiality of the physician-patient relationship and undermine the integrity of the medical profession. Recognizing these challenges, the American Medical Association (AMA) has issued recommendations to guide physicians' use of social media.

The AMA asks physicians to consider these issues when establishing an online social media presence:

- **Vigilantly protect patient privacy and confidentiality:** Do not post any identifiable patient information.
- **Use privacy settings, but know their limitations:** Be aware that privacy settings are not absolute. Anything posted on the Internet is likely to permanently remain there. Privacy settings do not guarantee actual privacy.
- **Monitor information posted by others:** Routinely monitor online pages to ensure that information others post is accurate and appropriate and that confidentiality is maintained.
- **Maintain appropriate boundaries with patients:** Just as in any other context, act within the ethical guidelines of the profession and interact with patients in a manner appropriate to the physician-patient relationship.
- **Separate business from personal:** To maintain your professional reputation, consider separating personal and professional content online.
- **Report unprofessional content:** If a colleague posts unprofessional content, you should bring it to the colleague's attention. If the content significantly violates professional norms and is not changed or removed, you should report the content to the proper authorities.
- **Preserve a professional reputation:** Before posting anything online, you should evaluate whether the information could negatively affect your reputation with patients or colleagues or your good standing in the medical profession.
- **Uphold public confidence in the medical profession:** Public trust in the medical profession is essential for successful physician-patient relationships, so avoid posting any content that could undermine that trust.

A complete list of the AMA guidelines is available [here](#).

If you have any questions about social media policies, please contact a member of the Health Law Practice Group or the Labor and Employment Law Practice Group at Warner Norcross & Judd.