SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Social networking offers the opportunity to interact, keep in contact, and develop longstanding professional and social interactions. As a student in a medical related field, you must be aware of the special obligations that your identity as a medical professional has and the public and potentially permanent nature of your postings in these forums. Although the use of social media provides the great potential to interact with a worldwide audience, it also provides the potential for significant lapses in professional behavior. Although sites may give the promise of privacy, anything posted on-line should be considered in the public realm and potentially visible by many people.

On social media, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are significantly blurred. Just by identifying yourself as SUNY Downstate student, you create a perception about Downstate by those who have access to your social network profile or weblog. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your position at the school and with SUNY Downstate’s values and professional standards.

As such, the following guidelines should be used when interacting with social media as a student, whether using the networks personally or professionally or whether using personal or college-owned equipment. (Note: These policies apply only to students. For policy guidelines for faculty, staff, and for use of official SUNY Downstate Social Media accounts, contact the Office of Intuitional Advancement.)

1. Social network postings are subject to the same professionalism standards as any other personal interactions. For a definition of professionalism, see the SUNY Downstate Honor Code. The permanence and written nature of these postings make them even more subject to scrutiny than most other forms of communication. Students are subject to disciplinary actions within the school for comments that are either unprofessional or violate patient privacy.

2. You should not use SUNY Downstate logos or logos of our clinical affiliates without permission of the Office of Intuitional Advancement (at Downstate) or the appropriate office at an affiliate.

3. Avoid giving specific medical advice on-line, and remember that any medically related site or site that contains medically related opinions should contain the disclaimer that “The posts on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the position or opinion of SUNY Downstate.” Remember to always differentiate the difference between medical opinions and medical facts.

4. Use of Social Media can have legal ramifications. Comments made regarding care of patients or that portray you, colleagues, or a SUNY Downstate department in an unprofessional manner can be used in court or other disciplinary proceedings.

5. Always be aware of what others post on your social media sites and how they may reflect on you. It may be useful to use controls that either block or require your approval before others can post directly onto your social media. Remember that you can be held responsible for photos or content which others post about you, especially if you are “tagged” in them.

6. Keep in mind that statements and photos posted on Social Media sites are potentially viewable by future employers, and even if deleted can be recovered under certain circumstances. Be aware too, that images can be downloaded by and forwarded to others. It is not uncommon for potential employers to search for the social network profiles of potential hires, and there are many examples of people not being offered a job because of findings on social networking sites.
7. Be mindful of your privacy settings and check them often. Be sure to use settings which optimize your privacy and security and avoid sharing personal information about yourself such as addresses, phone numbers, or data (such as license numbers or identification numbers) which may be used to gain access to your records.

8. Confidentiality regulations apply on-line as they do in person. Posting pictures of patients (including photos depicting the body parts of patients), patient names, or any information about patients is NEVER permitted under any circumstance, and can subject you not just to disciplinary action, but legal ramifications as a violation of HIPAA.

9. Maintain the privacy of fellow students, colleagues, medical professionals, and other hospital or clinical employees unless they have given you permission for their name or likeness to be used.

10. Interaction with patients on social media is prohibited for students (unless the person was known in another capacity prior to them becoming a patient).

11. Relationships online with faculty, preceptors, attending physicians, fellows, supervising residents, interns, and other medical students are all governed by the SUNY Downstate policy against sexual harassment and violations of that policy are not tolerated. Cyber stalking, requests from those who supervise you to engage in activities outside of work, and inappropriate postings to social networking sites can all be considered forms of sexual harassment and should be reported immediately to the Office of Student Affairs or to the Title IX Coordinator.

Students are strongly encouraged to alert colleagues to unprofessional or potentially offensive comments made online to avoid future indiscretions and refer them to these guidelines. Students should also be aware of Social Media or Networking policies at the Clinical Site which you may be assigned as they may be more restrictive than this policy.