



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY
Physician Assistant Studies

Policy - Social Media

Origin Date: November 8, 2013

Last Evaluated: April, 2017

Responsible Party: Program Director

Minimum Review Frequency: Triennially

Approving Body: Principal Faculty

DPAS Associated Forms: None

ARC-PA Associated Standards: N/A

Background and Purpose

The purpose of this policy is three-fold: 1) to define ethical and professional expectations regarding the use of social media by medical professionals, 2) to define program-specific behavioral expectations pertinent to social media in the classroom and other educational environments, and 3) to communicate a resource that supports student development in their personal and corporate use of social media.

Policy Statement

Social Media and the Medical Professional

The HPU Physician Assistant Program Supports the American Medical Association's (AMA) opinion titled "Professionalism in the Use of Social Media". The opinion has been quoted below with modifications to align with physician assistant education and practice. The original opinion is available at: <http://www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/code-medical-ethics/9124a.pdf>

The Internet has created the ability for physician assistant (PA) students and PAs to communicate and share information quickly and to reach millions of people easily. Participating in social networking and other similar Internet-based opportunities can support a PAs personal expression, enable individual PAs to have a professional presence online, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the profession, and provide opportunity to widely disseminate public health messages and other health communications. Social networks, blogs, and other forms of communication online also create new challenges to the patient-provider relationship. PAs should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:

(a) PAs should be cognizant of standards of patient privacy and confidentiality that must be maintained in all environments, including online, and must refrain from posting identifiable patient information online.

(b) When using the Internet for social networking, PAs should use privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content to the extent possible, but should realize that privacy settings are not absolute and that once on the Internet, content is likely there permanently. Thus, PAs should routinely monitor their own Internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about them by others, is accurate and appropriate.

(c) If they interact with patients on the Internet, PAs must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-provider relationship in accordance with professional ethical guidelines just as they would in any other context.

(d) To maintain appropriate professional boundaries PAs should separate personal and professional content online.

(e) When PAs see content posted by colleagues that appears unprofessional they have a responsibility to bring that content to the attention of the individual, so that he or she can remove it and/or take other appropriate actions. If the behavior significantly violates professional norms and the individual does not take appropriate action to resolve the situation, the PA should report the matter to appropriate authorities.

(f) PAs must recognize that actions online and posted content may negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers (particularly for PA students), and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

Program-Specific Social Media Expectations

HPU PA students and faculty should understand and adhere to the following guidelines and professional considerations when engaging in social media networking:

- HPU PA Faculty and Staff members are not permitted to extend or accept “friend requests” to/from students.
- Classroom and clinical site training commitments should be respected. Students should not engage in social networking during in-class and on-site clinical time.
- The integrity of the coursework of the HPU PA program, student, and classroom should be protected. Students should not share questions or answers to assignments, exams, or quizzes via social media nor provide this information to students in a subsequent class.
- Patient privacy must be protected. Students should not share any identifiable patient or clinical information via social media. HIPAA laws apply to all social networking sites.
- Students should ensure accuracy regarding statements made about the HPU PA program and its community members. Students should not provide false, intentionally inaccurate, or inflammatory comments.
- All laws governing copyright and fair use of intellectual property must be followed.
- Students should recognize that one’s professional reputation can be affected through social networking and therefore be judicious when posting content.

Developing Professional Social Media Behaviors

Specific advice and guidelines on using social media as an individual or when representing your institution have been well delineated by the University of Michigan. See:
<http://www.voices.umich.edu/docs/Social-Media-Guidelines.pdf>

Approved by: Principal Faculty

Modified: February 2015, March 2016, April 2017

Next Review: Spring 2020