



Policy - Social Media

Origin Date: November 8, 2013

Last Evaluated: May 2023

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: [Professionalism in the Use of Social Media | ama-coe \(ama-assn.org\)](https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-coe/professionalism-in-the-use-of-social-media)

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

- (a) Physician assistants 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 social media for educational purposes or to exchange information professionally with other physicians, follow ethics guidance regarding confidentiality, privacy and informed consent.
- (c) When using the Internet for social networking, physicians 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, physicians 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.
- (d) If they interact with patients on the Internet, physician assistants must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-physician relationship in accordance with professional ethics guidance just as they would in any other context.
- (e) To maintain appropriate professional boundaries physician assistants should consider separating personal and professional content online.
- (f) When physician assistants 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 physician assistant should report the matter to appropriate authorities.
- (g) Physician assistants must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers (particularly for physicians-in-training and medical 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:

<https://hr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/voices-social-media-guidelines.pdf>

Approved by: Principal Faculty

Modified: February 2015, March 2016, April 2017, April 2020, April 2023

Next Review: Spring 2026