Opting in to Online Professionalism: Social Media and Pediatrics

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY

The Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics (COMSEP) is committed to excellence in medical student education in pediatrics. This article continues our series on skills of, and strategies used by, great clinical teachers. Kind et al argue that the digital world provides a great opportunity for clinical educators to promote and enhance student education and model professionalism. They provide resources and tips to get started using this domain.

—Susan Bannister, MD Editor-in-Chief, COMSEP Monthly Feature

Social media can be described as a digital space for creating and sharing information with others, disseminating it widely and rapidly.1 It can extend real-life learning and relationships into a shared space to foster online connections and learning. Physicians and physicians-in-training are entering this digital environment with little guidance on best practices. Professionalism lapses online can have consequences not only for individuals but also for public trust in the medical profession.2 And yet, when used well, social media enriches the personal and professional lives of clinicians and learners. We'll consider the risky (red) zone, the safe but go slow (yellow) zone, and the option to opportunity (green) zone to explain the challenges students may face and to outline how to teach and model professionalism in the use of social media.

WHERE AND HOW ARE PEOPLE CONNECTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Several studies describe social media use by medical students,3,4 physicians,5,6 and medical educators.7 In 2012, 67% of online adults reported using Facebook, 20% LinkedIn, 16% Twitter, 15% Pinterest, 13% Instagram, and 6% Tumblr.8,9 These and other platforms allow users to connect through words, photos, audio, or videos in various ways: privately or publicly, synchronously or asynchronously, and uni- or multidirectionally. There are also less public avenues, such as secure or physician-only networks where credentials are verified, such as Doximity, QuantiaMD, Sermo,and forMD. The decision to use an invitation-only, secure forum or a more publicly available domain depends on one's goals.

THE GUIDELINES: MAINTAINING ONLINE PROFESSIONALISM

Organizations, including the American Medical Association (AMA),[2] the Canadian Medical Association,[10] the Federation of State Medical Boards,[11] and some medical schools,[12] have guidelines regarding professionalism in the use of social media, emphasizing pitfalls and benefits of engagement.[13] Modeling and teaching this dimension of professionalism, online, digital, or e-professionalism, is increasingly important.[14] The AMA recommends that physicians with a social media presence maintain patient privacy, routinely monitor their presence, maintain appropriate boundaries just as they would in other contexts