A New E-Professionalism/Social Media Course: Student Reflections and Impact

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Background

This poster provides a review of interim results from a qualitative study on first year medical students' attitudes and perceptions of their definition of professionalism in social media.

Included in the study is an evaluation of changes in perspective since becoming a medical student and after participating in an E-Professionalism and Social Media instructional session.

Methods

- E-Professionalism and Social Media session held with first year medical students (January 2012)
- Session:
  - Students responded to audience response system questions reflecting on their social media usage and real-life examples of social media content (e.g. Facebook, blogs, Twitter) posted by healthcare professionals and students
  - Discussion about appropriate and inappropriate uses
  - Panel discussion with GW physicians who use social media
- Post-session reflection exercise:
  - Students responded to specific prompts requesting them to reflect on their personal social media experiences, their interpretation of online medical professionalism and create a draft of social media guidelines.
- Study:
  - 64 students consented to participate
  - Reflections were de-identified, and independently coded by two investigators to elicit themes.
- All four investigators met to reconcile codes and ensure inter-rater reliability.

Results

Multiple themes have emerged, summarized here by question.

Who are you representing online?

- Students reported a range of responses including representing themselves (either solely or in conjunction with others), their university or employer, the medical profession, their family, and their friends or peers.
- Some students felt that they represented different entities depending on which social media tool they used.

- I believe that whether someone is representing himself, his university, or his profession depends on the actual online medium being utilized.

- I am going to be an MD doctor in about three and a half years and do not want my patients to come across me online and look at me in any other way than they did when we were in the examining room.

- "When I go online, I am aware that I am representing myself, my family, my friends, my future career in medicine, and any institutions that I am associated with."

How do you define e-professionalism?

- Students defined e-professionalism in many different ways (complying with HIPPA, using common sense, following the values and standards of your institution). Some viewed e-professionalism as the same as professionalism in the real world.

What changes have you made to your social media presence since entering medical school?

- Since entering medical school, students have limited access, changed content and photos, increased awareness of possible repercussions, and changed frequency of use.
- Some students had already made changes to limit access to their social media presence before entering medical school (high school, college, during medical school application process).

After participating in this session, are you considering changing anything in your social media presence?

- 37%
- 58%
- 5%

If you were to draft a “social media guideline” for the incoming first-year class what would it look like?

- Many students felt that incorporating some language to raise awareness of possible social media impact was important
- Some students suggested including specific examples, while others listed particular dos and don'ts.
- Limiting access to personal social media pages was mentioned, as well as removing unprofessional content.
- A few students advocated that no guidelines are necessary, and only one student explicitly said social media tools should not be utilized.

Conclusions

Medical students are consumers and producers of social media. Including online professionalism in the curriculum in this way with a focus on implication and best practices can help them develop an awareness of their professional presence in this electronic era.

Student suggestions for social media guidelines can serve as possible building blocks for the development of an institution's social media policy, if desired.

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