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 medical 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 health care 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?
- Doctor, family, peers
- Medical profession
- University/employer

"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."

"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 operating room."

"The information on my Facebook page represents the person I am, personally and professionally, and also my employees, high school, undergraduate university and GW medical school."

What changes have you made to your social media presence since entering medical school?
- Made more private
- Changed content, photos
- Increased awareness
- No change

"I have more privacy limitations on my Facebook page now, and I rarely post pictures from social events. I more or less use my Facebook page to stay in touch with family and friends."

"I have changed the way I use Facebook, always careful not to post inappropriate photographs or anything my future doctors can see."

"Upon entering medical school, my social media identity has not changed very drastically. The main thing that I have done is to be more selective about what I say and do online. Things that I would have previously said to friends on Facebook I have now cut out because I have begun to feel that certain things would cause me to get into trouble. Yet after some time, I decided that I do not have to delete my account but instead just need to invest time in what I am posting and how I use my time online.

I have not really changed my professionalism online since medical school started because I always held it at some professional standard, but may review this closer down the medical road to becoming a doctor."

How do you define e-professionalism?
- In other words, I would define e-professionalism as simply embodying the behaviors of a professional online, including both words and actions.

- This would include that the standards to which one holds oneself should even be higher in terms of online communication, since information has more weight and is often available for an indefinite period of time to unknown persons."

If you were to draft a “social media guideline” for the incoming first-year class what would it look like?
- Be conscious of any future postings, photos, or actions as you enter your medical school education. Anything that can be found online may be used against you.

- Google your name online and see what information comes up. In the information and remove any information that you do not like or approve of as soon as possible.

- Be respectful of other social media users.

- Complaining on Facebook about an upcoming exam I think is fine (although not terribly productive). I always make sure not to cause harm to patients.

- I think my social media presence was fairly professional prior to the session; now I am much more careful in what I say and think is appropriate online.

- I think a good general guideline is to say true to ourselves but remember that when we first put on those white coats back in August, we came to represent part of a larger network of professionals. Ultimately, we must respect our patients, our colleagues, and ourselves."

- Limit access
  - I would suggest that students keep personal profiles private; indicate that they are not official representatives of GW, and keep a list of current supervisors and faculty for access.

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.

This study hopes to inform the development of social media policies at medical schools. Additional data is being analyzed for a subsequent cohort of medical students.

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