Social Media and Medical Students: What are they thinking?
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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 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?
- Self, 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 institution 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 anatomy lab.”

- “The information on my Facebook page represents the person I am, personally and professionally, and also my employer, 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 outings. I more or less use my Facebook page to stay in touch with family and friends.”

- “Upon entering medical school, my social media identity has not changed very drastically. The main thing that I have done is to be more vigilant about what I say and do online. Things that I would have previously used to friends on Facebook, I have not done because I have begun to feel that others could take the comment out of context. At one point, I even debated whether or not I should remove my Twitter account and decided not to worry about anything that could cause me to get in trouble. Yet after some time, I decided that I do not have to delete my account but instead just need to monitor it more carefully. I now log my account for I have some media that I don’t admire things on the website that, for example, I would be easy to talk about with my parents.”

- “I have not really changed my professionalism online since medical school started because I always heed it at some professional standard, but may revise this as I continue down the medical school road to becoming a doctor.”

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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