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## **POLICY: Social Media and Online Presence Policy**

The Internet has created the ability for physician assistant students to communicate and share information quickly and to reach millions of people easily. Participating in social networking and other similar Internet opportunities can support PA students' personal expression, enable individual PA students to have a professional presence online, foster collegiality and camaraderie within the profession, and provide opportunity 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-provider relationship.

### **PA students should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:**

1. PA students 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.
2. When using the Internet for social networking, PA students 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, PA students 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.
3. If they interact with patients on the Internet, PA students must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-provider relationship in accordance with professional ethical guidelines just, as they would in any other context.
4. To maintain appropriate professional boundaries PA students should consider separating personal and professional content online.
5. When PA students 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 PA student should report the matter to appropriate authorities.
6. PA students 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 PA students), and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

Adapted from the American Medical Association Council on Ethical & Judicial Affairs (CEJA) Report on Professionalism in the Use of Social Media

<https://www.ama-assn.org/sites/default/files/media-browser/public/about-ama/councils/Council%20Reports/council-on-ethics-and-judicial-affairs/i10-ceja-professionalism-use-social-media.pdf>

## **Program Expectations**

1. The Bryant University PA Program does not *routinely* monitor student social media accounts. The Program considers posting of negative commentary regarding the Program, Faculty, Staff or fellow students in a public forum to be a violation of our professionalism expectations for students. In the event that inappropriate program related content from a student's social media account is brought to the attention of the Program, the matter will be reviewed by the program faculty and Academic Affairs Division. In addition, if the content posted violates guidelines set by HIPAA or FERPA, students may face dismissal from the program as well as HIPAA mandated fines and criminal consequences from outside agencies.
2. Bryant University Faculty and Staff Members are **not permitted** to extend or accept "friend requests" to/from students. Connecting on Linked-In is encouraged to help foster the professional presence of the student.
3. The use of social media during didactic classroom time and during clinical rotations is prohibited. This action clearly shows a lack of respect for the lecturer/preceptor and reflects poorly on the program as a whole. Infractions of this policy will result in a reduction in the professionalism component of the class/rotation grade.
4. Bryant University PA Program materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, assignments, quizzes are considered intellectual property of the University and the Professor/Lecturer and should not be shared outside of the current class in any form including posting on Social Media or publicly available websites or files sharing sites.
5. Patient privacy must be protected.
6. Students should not share any identifiable patient or clinical information via social media. HIPAA laws apply to all social networking sites.
7. Students should ensure accuracy regarding statements made about the Bryant University PA program and its community members. Students should not provide false, intentionally inaccurate, or inflammatory comments.
8. All laws governing copyright and fair use of intellectual property must be followed.
9. Students should recognize that one's professional reputation can be affected through social networking and therefore be judicious when posting content.

## **As a representative of Bryant University, The PA Program, and the PA Profession:**

1. Take Responsibility and Use Good Judgment. You are responsible for the material you post on personal blogs or other social media. *Be courteous, respectful, and thoughtful about how other Personnel may perceive or be affected by postings.* Incomplete, inaccurate, inappropriate, threatening, harassing or poorly worded postings may be harmful to others. They may damage relationships, undermine Bryant University's Brand or reputation, discourage teamwork, and negatively impact the institution's commitment to patient care, education, research, and community service.
2. Think Before You Post. Anything you post is highly likely to be permanently connected to you and your reputation through Internet and email archives. Future employers often have access to this information and may use it to evaluate you. Take great care and be thoughtful before placing your identifiable comments in the public domain.
3. Protect Patient Privacy. Disclosing information about patients without written permission, including photographs or potentially identifiable information, is strictly prohibited. These rules also apply to deceased patients and to posts in the secure section of your Facebook page that is accessible by approved friends only.
4. Protect Your Own Privacy. Make sure you understand how the privacy policies and security features work on the sites where you are posting material.
5. Respect Work Commitments. Ensure that your blogging, social networking, and other external media activities do not interfere with your work commitments.
6. Identify Yourself. If you communicate in social media about your institution, *disclose your connection and your role.* Use good judgment and strive for accuracy in your communications. False and unsubstantiated claims, and inaccurate or inflammatory postings may create liability.
7. Use a Disclaimer. Where your connection to your institution is apparent, make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of any organization. A disclaimer, such as, "The views expressed on this [blog; website] are my own and do not reflect the views of the Bryant University PA Program," may be appropriate.

8. Respect Copyright and Fair Use Laws. For your institution's protection as well as your own, it is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including your institution's own copyrights and brands.
9. Protect Proprietary Information. Do not share confidential or proprietary information that may compromise business practices or security. Similarly, do not share information in violation of any laws or regulations.
10. Seek Expert Guidance. Consult with the program faculty if you have any questions about the appropriateness of materials you plan to publish or if you require clarification on whether specific information has been publicly disclosed before you disclose it publicly.
11. Failure to abide by PA Program policies may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the program.

Adapted from: "Mount Sinai Medical Center Social Media Guideline." Mount Sinai School of Medicine.  
<http://icahn.mssm.edu/about/faculty-resources/handbook/institutional/social-media>

## **Standard**

### **ANNOTATION:**

Review: 12/13/17

- Medical Director
- Director of Clinical Education

Forwarded for Approval: 12/14/17

- Associate Program Director

Approved: 12/14/17

- Program Director