



MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Communications Division

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Policy Statement: Social Media for Physicians

Social media is a powerful tool for communication with direct beneficial applications, including medical education and public health awareness.

The risks of social media activity for physicians, particularly when the lines between one's personal life intersect with their professional life, includes the potential for inappropriate patient relationships, HIPAA and other confidentiality violations, and presenting oneself, one's employer/hospital, or one's profession in an unfavorable light. In addition, social media can amplify and extend errors in judgment, demeanor and behavior far beyond historical, non-social media interactions.

When engaging in social media for professional or personal purposes, it is recommended that physicians maintain proper ethical and professional conduct standards.

Guidelines for MSSNY Leadership

When posting on social media, MSSNY leadership should be aware of MSSNY policy on topical issues. Leadership should speak with one voice and use discretion and common sense in their posts.

As a MSSNY Officer, you must always assume that any comments you make can and will be construed in a variety of ways, one of which will be to attribute it to MSSNY and to your position within the organization.

Therefore, you must exercise extreme caution when posting in whatever electronic media that you utilize and make the assumption that anyone can attribute your opinions, as personal as you thought they were, to MSSNY.

#MSSNY



Social Media and MSSNY

In xx of 2019, the MSSNY Board of Directors approved a policy statement regarding the use of social media by member physicians:

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Guidelines for all Physicians

- Physicians have the responsibility to ensure that patient privacy and confidentiality are recognized and maintained in their social media activity. Assuring that no identified or de-identified Protected Health Information (PHI) is posted is critical, but not sufficient, to meet this requirement.
- Improper use of social media by physicians may allow patients or their representatives to be identified in violation of their privacy. These concerns may even extend to various information sharing or diagnostic platforms, including crowd sourcing of cases for clinical discussion or input. Verbal consent, either implicit or explicit, for such public disclosure is not adequate for a HIPAA-compliant authorization for disclosure of PHI and is not a defense or justification for such disclosures.
- Physicians should maintain appropriate, professional boundaries with patients and families, regarding social media.
- As we recognize, all social media activity may become public and exist indefinitely. As such, physicians should be aware that their social media activity, unrelated to their profession, can reflect on public perceptions of them as a physician, their medical societies, and the profession of medicine in general.

- Social media has created an additional area of professional liability independent of clinical practice and can extend to the physician's administrative roles as well. In general, social media content is not protected and is discoverable.
- Physicians should be aware of and follow their employer's and institution's specific policies on the use of social media.

Social Media Best Practice

Social Media

Social media channels provide a great way to communicate news, information, updates and more with your audience.

Content

Keep it Short and Simple

Length of posts depends on the best practices of the specific channel, but should typically be no more than 250 characters for Facebook and LinkedIn. For Twitter although there is a 280-character count limit, keeping it to no more than 130 characters will make it easy to share.

Style

Due to the limitation of characters by some social networks the following styles are acceptable when posting to social media channels:

- Use contractions whenever possible
- Shorthand symbols such as >, =, &, %, and @ are allowed.
- Use numerals, does not work for all numbers.
- Use am and pm rather than a.m. and p.m.
- No Copyright/Trademark/Registration symbol is used in character-restricted communication.
- Use acronyms whenever applicable making sure to link to content that defines the acronym.

Hashtags

Hashtags allow you to streamline discussions and make it easier for people to follow and engage in conversations related to your topic or event. While extremely popular (and originated) on Twitter they have spread to Facebook, LinkedIn and many other social channels. Create hashtags that are short but meaningful – if hashtags are too long they will be harder for people to use in retweets and engagements. If the hashtag has no meaning to the message it will be easily forgotten and not used.

Graphics/Images

It is always a good rule to include graphics/images with your post. It has been shown that posts including graphics/images generate more reach and engagement.

Relevancy

The graphic/image you use should be relevant to the content you are posting.

Copyright Policies

It is illegal to post a graphic from any source, including Google Images, to display on social media, even if you credit the source. For this type of usage, you must first obtain permission from the owner in writing. If you are unsure, do not post it.

Links

Social media posts should include a link that directs the user to your call to action – register, view article or visit a page.

Posting

Frequency

There is a lot of noise and continuous stream of information being posted. It is good to put out reminders (at least once a week) to catch those fans/followers that may have missed previous updates. But remember you should also be posting about other topics as well. It is recommended to keep promotional posts to 20%. Too much self-promotion can be seen negatively.

Law of Reciprocity

You cannot expect people to share your content and promote your ideas if you are not doing the same for others. Spend time reading through your channel feeds to find thought-provoking content that you feel compelled to share.

Closed Blogs

Closed blogs are NOT social media.

If you choose to belong to a closed blog (meaning that you know who is included in the circle of readers and writers), do not get a false sense of security that your message will remain within the confines of the blog members. Everyone in the group has the ability to forward blog posts to ANYONE with an email address (i.e. your employer, your family, your colleagues). With this knowledge in hand, choose your words carefully. Assume that your message may be forwarded to anyone, anywhere, at any time.