

Digital Content on the Internet, Electronic Networking and Other Media

This policy applies to all residents and fellows at Bridgeport Hospital. Use of the Internet includes posting on blogs, instant messaging [IM], social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, e-mail, posting to public media sites, mailing lists and posting of audio/video material.

The ease with which we can now record, store and transmit information in electronic format brings new responsibilities to those working in healthcare with respect to privacy of patient information and ensuring public trust in our hospitals, physicians and staff. New advances in technology bring significant educational benefits to trainees, as well as improve communication between health care providers.

Policy:

There are notable risks associated with use of electronic networking, the internet and other media. This includes but is not limited to:

1. **Patient privacy:** Privacy and confidentiality between the physician and patient are of utmost importance. All health care providers have an obligation to maintain the privacy of patient health information as outlined by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Material that identifies patients, (without their consent) and is intentionally or unintentionally placed in the public domain constitutes a breach of standards of professionalism and confidentiality.
2. **Professional image/persona:** Physicians' professional images are important and should be protected. Portrayal of unprofessional behavior may impair a physician's ability to effectively practice medicine, become licensed and participate in positions of trust and responsibility in the community. All material published on the web should be considered public and permanent. There should be a "think before you post" attitude. It is also appropriate to be proactive and routinely perform searches for your individual names online and identify material posted without your consent.
3. **Appropriate internet use:** Trainees should be guided and staff should be mindful of appropriate use of the Internet and electronic publication. Patient care and safety should never be compromised due to distraction during use of electronic material. Never leave printed patient information on printers unattended. Providers should always log off from applications containing patient information after using computer terminals in the hospital.
4. **E-mail communication:** The tone and content of all electronic conversations should remain professional. The use of a privacy disclaimer on all professional emails is advised. Privacy disclaimers should include a notice of confidentiality, and advise recipients of appropriate handling of misdirected email.

As an example, “This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error, please notify the system manager. This message contains confidential information and is intended only for the individual named. If you are not the named addressee, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this email. Please notify the sender immediately by email if you have received this email by mistake and delete this email from your system. If you are not the intended recipient, you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited”.

5. **Internet posts:** Never post private information about any patient on the internet. This applies even if no one other than a patient is able to identify him/herself from the posted information. If a resident or fellow directly or indirectly identifies themselves as an employee and discusses their work, the Hospital expects them to express themselves professionally and consistent with the values of excellence, compassion and integrity. The content of postings when referring to colleagues and co-workers should be professional respecting the privacy rights of those individuals. When in doubt regarding postings consult with your Program Director, Department Chair or the GME Office.
6. **Social Networking Sites (SNS):** The use of blogging and microblogging on SNS such as MySpace®, Facebook®, Twitter® and Orkut® are on the rise. Material posted on these sites is visible to many individuals. Posting of inappropriate content on these sites not only affects the professional image of the individual but can harm the public image of the institution. Students, residents and staff are encouraged to refrain from discussing patient issues or posting pictures/videos taken at work. Capture or posting of digital content involving patients is strictly prohibited. It is rarely appropriate to ‘friend’ patients or look at their private profile on a SNS. Users of SNS should consider setting privacy to the highest level, and periodically review them to ensure they are maintained.
7. **Academic Integrity:** Breach of academic trust by sharing examination questions by mobile devices is an ethical violation in addition to a breach of copyright law. Engaging in such violations constitute misconduct and can result in disciplinary action.

Penalties for inappropriate use of the Internet and other electronic media

The penalties for inappropriate use of the Internet and other electronic media include:

- Discipline for breach of hospital or institutional policy
- Remediation, dismissal or failure to promote

Enforcement

- All professionals have a collective professional duty to assure appropriate, behavior, particularly in matters of patient privacy and confidentiality.

A person who has reason to believe that another person has contravened these guidelines should approach his/her immediate supervisor/program director for advice or contact the GME Office.

References:

YNHH Policy: YNHHS Social Networking and Online Communications Policy

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