

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE JACKSONVILLE
Office of Educational Affairs

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POLICY

The administration of the College of Medicine recognizes that social networking websites and applications, including but not limited to *Facebook, InstaGram, and Twitter*, are an important and timely means of communication. However, students and residents who use these websites and other applications must be aware of the critical importance of privatizing their web sites so that only trustworthy “friends” have access to the websites/applications. They must also be aware that posting certain information is illegal. Violation of existing statutes and administrative regulations may expose the offender to criminal and civil liability, and the punishment for violations may include fines and imprisonment. Offenders also may be subject to adverse academic actions outlined in the Professionalism Code of Conduct (PCC).

The following actions are **STRICTLY FORBIDDEN**:

- In your professional role as a care-giver, you may not present the personal health information of other individuals (PCC 2.4b, 4.2b). Removal of an individual’s name does not constitute proper de-identification of protected health information. Inclusion of data such as age, gender, race, diagnosis, date of evaluation, or type of treatment or the use of a highly specific medical photograph (such as a before/after photograph of a patient having surgery or a photograph of a patient from one of the medical outreach trips) may still allow the reader to recognize the identity of a specific individual.
- You may not report private (protected) academic information of another student or trainee (PCC 2.4b, 4.2b). Such information might include, but is not limited to: course or clerkship grades, narrative evaluations, examination scores, or adverse academic actions.
- In posting information on social networking sites, you may not present yourself as an official representative or spokesperson for the University of Florida College of Medicine (PCC2.5e).
- You may not represent yourself as another person (PCC 2.5c).
- You may not utilize websites and/or applications in a manner that interferes with your official work commitments (PCC 4.3a). That is, do not tie up a hospital or clinic computer with personal business when others need access to the computer for patient-related matters. Moreover, do not delay completion of assigned clinical responsibilities in order to engage in social networking.

In addition to the absolute prohibitions listed above, the actions listed below are **strongly discouraged**. Violations of these suggested guidelines may be considered unprofessional behavior and may be the basis for disciplinary action as outlined in the professionalism code of conduct.

- Display of vulgar language (PCC 4.1 a and b; 4.2 a and b)
- Display of language or photographs that imply disrespect for any individual or group because of age, race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (PCC 4.1 a and b; 4.2 a and b).
- Presentation of personal photographs or photographs of others that may reasonably be interpreted as condoning irresponsible use of alcohol, substance abuse, or sexual promiscuity (PCC 2.5e).
- Posting of potentially inflammatory or unflattering material on another individual’s website, e.g. on the “wall” of that individual’s Facebook site (PCC 4.1 b; 4.2 a and b).

Maintain separation between your personal and professional activities if you are going to participate in internet based social networking activities. The use of your UF email (jax.ufl.edu) for

personal activities is forbidden. Your UF email may be used for University and professionally-related activities. Some networking sites have created professionally related “groups,” and the sharing of ideas and knowledge should not be restricted by this or any other policy. However, one should be aware of the stated pitfalls and maintain professional and personal separation. Use a separate and distinct email account for internet-based, personal social networking activities. Individuals also should make every effort to present themselves in a mature, responsible, and professional manner. Discourse should always be civil and respectful. Requests to ‘friend’ a patient should be respectfully declined. Requests from patients to either share social networking contact information or for informal communications and consultation should be redirected to the approved (PCC2.2b) UFCOM-J and/or departmental standard communication and contact mechanisms. Please note the UF policy on appropriate use of email and electronic messaging which can be found at <https://ufcn.urel.ufl.edu/email/email.html> and <https://it.ufl.edu/policies/>.

Please be aware that no privatization measure is perfect and that undesigned persons may still gain access to your networking site. A site such as *YouTube*, of course, is completely open to the public. Future employers (residency or fellowship program directors, department chairs, or private practice partners) often review these network sites when considering potential candidates for employment.

Finally, although once-posted information can be removed from the original social networking site, *exported* information cannot be recovered. Any digital exposure can “live on” beyond its removal from the original website and continue to circulate in other venues. Therefore, think carefully before you post any information on a website or application. Always be modest, respectful, and professional in your actions.