

## **Principles for Social Networking for POLST Programs**

**Developed by the POLST Communications Committee**

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Online social networking facilitates collegial communication among professionals and the public and provides convenient and timely forums for education. It also presents remarkable potential for public education and health guidance, contributing to online professional presence. Social networking should be easy, exciting and fun. At the same time, the inherent nature of social networking invites the sharing of personal information or work experiences that may reflect poorly on professionalism. These principles should help maintain the balance.

### **Principles for Social Networking for POLST Paradigm Programs**

#### **1. Identify yourself and others where possible.**

- a. Use your real name to post whenever possible.
- b. Post a picture of yourself for identification in your profile, if you are comfortable.
- c. On un-named accounts (i.e. National POLST Facebook (FB)/twitter account) consider naming the managers of the account or require signatures on tweets/posts. For example, if Katie Orem wrote a certain post, it would be signed –ko at the end.
- d. Use appropriate tagging. This means @ (mentions) and # (hashtag) on Twitter and @ (naming people) on appropriate Facebook posts.

#### **2. Post relevant information responsibly.**

- a. Frame the message to support the value of POLST Paradigm Programs as a process.
- b. Post relevant content, interesting facts, and quick photos.
- c. Use posts to educate; consider using questions to jump-start discussions.
- d. Check with the appropriate POLST leadership if you have any concerns the information you are considering posting may be controversial.
- e. Be thoughtful towards your POLST colleagues – if you see a POLST colleague post something that is professionally relevant, re-tweet/re-post/share/like it.
- f. Recognize that patients, colleagues, institutions, employers, friends and family may be viewing your postings.
- g. You are ultimately responsible for your posts. Be sure to comply with any applicable policies of your institution as well as applicable laws and regulations, such as HIPAA.

#### **3. Be active.**

- a. Post relevant content to each account frequently (at least every few days, when possible) – particularly Twitter.
- b. Consider connecting accounts (for example, making Facebook posts go to Twitter automatically).
- c. Consider setting up appropriate alerts for when someone likes/retweets/replies/follows/friends you, or even posts to your page. You may want to acknowledge these things, or even reply back.

#### **4. Be respectful in handling and responding to posts or replies.**

- a. If postings are inappropriate (inflammatory or vulgar) or spam, the user can mark as inappropriate or spam and the account administrator should delete and flag the spam. It is essential to not simply delete the spam. Flagging it is the only way it is stopped.

- b. Keep postings that are legitimate and respectful, even when they address tough issues. Consider whether certain postings can be used as an opportunity to educate.
- 5. Recognize the difference in personal and professional information.**
- a. Before posting confirm you are logged into the correct account, or in the case of FB, “acting” as the correct person or entity. It is easy to be auto-logged into the wrong account if you have multiple accounts.
  - b. Avoid posting exclusively personal items using exclusively professional accounts. There are always gray personal-professional areas. Use good judgment.
  - c. Be mindful of privacy settings and with whom the information is being shared.
- 6. Respect Patient Privacy.**
- a. Recognize that individuals in the community may choose to share personal health information.
  - b. However, professionals must comply with HIPAA. Thus, do not transmit or place on line individually identifiable patient information without the authorization or consent from the patient or his/her health care representative. Ideally keep a copy of the consent or authorization on file.
  - c. When posting information or photos gained through a provider-patient relationship, obtain authorization from the patient or his/her health care representative.
  - d. If you wish to take or share photos or videos of patients on personal devices, including smart phones or cell phones, request authorization or consent of the patient or his/her health care representative.
  - e. Promptly report a breach of patient privacy to the appropriate person for quick removal from an account. Recognize it is not always possible in practical terms and is dependent on account access. For example, for the National POLST account, contact the social networking administrator.
- 7. Observe ethical and professional standards.**
- a. As professionals, we are obliged to protect a patient’s privacy, rights and welfare.
  - b. Obtain appropriate permissions or approvals to post information and provide references or attributions where appropriate (a link usually suffices).
  - c. Remember that standards of professionalism are the same online as in any other circumstance.
  - d. Pause before posting and remember that once posted, nothing can ever be completely deleted from the internet.
  - e. Refrain from making disparaging remarks about patients, employers or co-workers, even if they are not identified.

## **References**

American Nurses Association. 2013. *Social Networking Principles Toolkit*. Retrieved from: <http://nursingworld.org/FunctionalMenuCategories/AboutANA/Social-Media/Social-Networking-Principles-Toolkit> Accessed: 18 January 2013.

Orem, K. 2012, March 1. *Social Media & Networking 101* [Webinar, PowerPoint]. Webinar retrieved from: <http://cc.callinfo.com/play?id=crirf>. PowerPoint retrieved from: <http://www.compassionandsupport.org/pdfs/professionals/molst/SocialMedia101.pdf>. Accessed: 18 January 2013.