



American College of
Emergency Physicians®

ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

POLICY STATEMENT

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Use of Social Media by Emergency Physicians

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Social media is a powerful tool for communication with beneficial applications, including emergency medical education and public health awareness. The risks of social media activity for emergency physicians, particularly when the lines between one's personal life and professional life intersect, include the potential for inappropriate patient relationships, confidentiality violations, and presenting oneself, one's employer/hospital, or one's profession in an unfavorable light. Social media can amplify errors in judgment, demeanor, and behavior far beyond their historical context.

When using social media for professional or personal purposes, emergency physicians should maintain proper standards of ethical and professional conduct.

- Emergency physicians have a responsibility to ensure that their social media activity does not violate patient rights to privacy and confidentiality. Assuring that no Protected Health Information (PHI) is posted is critical, but not sufficient, to meet this requirement. A posted timeline and description of specific events or people can reveal PHI in an inadvertent but unauthorized way.
- These concerns may 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.
- Emergency physicians should maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients, patients' families, and colleagues, regarding social media.
- All social media activity may become public and exist indefinitely. Emergency physicians should therefore be aware that their personal social media activity can reflect on public perceptions of them as physicians, their healthcare organizations, and the specialty of emergency medicine.
- Social media has created an additional area of professional liability that is independent of clinical practice and can extend to the emergency physician's administrative roles as well. In general, social media content

is not protected and is discoverable. Emergency physicians should therefore exercise great caution regarding the content of their social media messages.

- Doxxing is the malicious use of social media to reveal an individual's personal information in an effort to injure, punish, or seek revenge against that person. Use of social media in this way by physicians is a clear violation of moral and professional responsibilities.