Developing A Social Media Policy for Your Hospital, Practice (Part II)

By Russell Faust, PhD, MD [2]

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In Part I of this blog series, we explored the beginning stages of creating a social media policy manual.

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STEP THREE: Draw up the guidelines for social Media use

Draw up the rules. Be explicit. Keep things as simple as possible. Include consequences for breaking the rules. Again, be sure to include leaders, evangelists, and tech gurus, and frontline staff.

Items to consider, and to explicitly spell out:

• Whether access to social media will be permitted at work; whether it will be encouraged
• Specify what degree of privacy can be expected on your site(s) — usually none
• Whether personal use will be permitted at work
• Assume that everything in the digital world is public, and forever
• Anything placed into the digital world by any employee is subject to legal discovery
• Never discuss individual patients; no exceptions.
• Never dispense medical advice
• Never respond to clinical questions from patients
• Never practice medicine online; ever.
• Never allow employees to post photographs of patients online
• Be honest and transparent — never pose as someone else
• Be respectful.
• Be positive.
• Be helpful.

Limit liability by establishing clear policies and procedures with regard to HIPAA compliance. The policy should clearly explain appropriate and inappropriate use of social media platforms.

Social Media Policy Models
There are some great social media policies in place at some great institutions.

Examples include:
• the Mayo Clinic;
• the Cleveland Clinic;
• the Vanderbilt University Medical Center; and
• the Centers for Disease Control

Ed Bennett, an authority on Healthcare Social Media, has collected some links to social media policies from various hospitals.

Be certain to take a look at the Vanderbilt toolkit for help in developing your Social Media Policy.

Use these examples as models. Fight the temptation to simply copy an existing policy. Your policy
must fit the actual use of social networks by your organization, by your personnel.

Keep in mind: your policy doesn’t need to be 50 pages long. The simpler the better.

Finally, also keep in mind that the vendors that serve your organization are considered an extension of your organization for HIPAA regulations. They are a “covered entity” for HIPAA considerations. Be certain that they are informed of your policies, including your social media policies.

Post your policy on your office website.

**In Summary**

Your organization must develop a social media policy manual. Whether the use of social media is merely tolerated in the workplace, or is an active, integral component of your brand, your policy must establish the rules for acceptable and unacceptable behavior, as well as the consequences for breaking the rules. Helping your employees understand what they can and cannot do in the digital world can help make social media a valuable tool for your hospital.

There is value in going through this exercise. It will help you clarify your goals and mission, and will empower your team to achieve those goals.

The other issues raised here — how to establish your online brand, and how to monitor that brand — will be reviewed in future issues of Physicians Practice's Practice Notes blog.

*For more on Russell Faust and our other Practice Notes bloggers, click [here](http://www.physicianspractice.com/authors/russell-faust-phd-md).*

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