

ICEA Position Paper

Social Media and HIPAA

Position

The International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) believes that social media is a valuable and important communication and marketing tool. When used wisely, social media expands communication and connectivity. When used improperly or unwisely, it can lead to confidentiality infringements and possibly Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) violations which could result in loss of employment or even criminal penalties. Birth professionals should review the proper use of social media while maintaining HIPAA compliance and making wise and ethical decisions on information to post.

Background

In the article “Social Media and Health Care Professionals: Benefits, Risks, and Best Practices” by C. Lee Ventola, it states:

The definition of “social media” is broad and constantly evolving. The term generally refers to Internet-based tools that allow individuals and communities to gather and communicate; to share information, ideas, personal messages, images, and other content; and, in some cases,

to collaborate with other users in real time. Social media are also referred to as “Web 2.0” or “social networking.”

Social media sites provide a variety of features that serve different purposes for the individual user. They may include blogs, social networks, video- and photo-sharing sites, wikis, or a myriad of other media, which can be grouped by purpose, serving functions such as:

- › Social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, Twitter)
- › Professional networking (LinkedIn)
- › Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr)
- › Content production (blogs [Tumblr, Blogger] and microblogs [Twitter])
- › Knowledge/information aggregation (Wikipedia)
- › Virtual reality and gaming environments (Second Life)

Implications for Practice

While social media has become vital to growing businesses, it is important to realize that once a photo or comment is posted online, it will never go away and can be reproduced. There are databases archiving hundreds of billions of webpages from decades past that can be retrieved at any time. Most social media

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sites have in their Terms and Conditions stipulations that you do not own the information posted on your personal social networking website which provides them the right to use all of your information forever.

All maternal child health professionals should be aware of the interplay between social media and HIPAA violations.

ICEA's 5 Tips to Avoid HIPAA Problems with Social Media

1. Remember the standards of birth professionalism are the same online as in any other circumstances.
2. Do not share or post information or photos gained through the birth professional-client relationship.
3. Maintain professional boundaries in the use of social media. Online contact with clients may blur this boundary.
4. Do not make negative remarks about clients, employers or colleagues, or birth facilities even if they are not clearly identified.
5. Do not take photos or videos of clients on personal devices including cell phones.

Adapted from the American Nursing Association's Tips to Avoid Problems with Social Media.

6. A patient may give you permission to share personal information or you may do so in special circumstances that may protect them. For specific details go to: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/mental-health/index.html>

ICEA's Guidelines for Use of Social Media

1. Comply with licensure requirements as well as state, federal and copyright laws.
2. Keep personal and professional social media sites separate.
3. Share only information from credible sources and refute inaccurate information.
4. Do not contact patients with requests to join your personal network sites.
5. Protect patient privacy by avoidance of posting photos, writing about or discussing them.
6. Do not offer personal medical advice or opinion.

References

- HIPAA FAQ's for Professionals <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/mental-health/index.html>
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