

BIOETHICS NOTES

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"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages."

William Shakespeare

Social Networking: Promises and Pitfalls

By Brenda A. Wands

"Organizations should emphasize culture, values, and ethics in order to mitigate reputational risk in these online communities." Deloitte LLP Ethics & Workplace Survey

Reading the report *Facebook Misconduct: Med Students Cross the Line*, Tuesday September 22, 2009, on the MSNBC website; I began to reflect on various issues related to social networking. A recent survey of medical school deans in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* acknowledged medical student misconduct using social networking sites. The deans admitted they were aware of unprofessional conduct by medical students in online social networking environments. The students' unprofessional conduct consisted of discussing patient information, unprofessional language, and lewd behavior in the online environment. Maybe this is the way medical students relieve stress and interact with each other.

In another article, *Study: Overwhelmed Doctors Make Mistakes*, on the MSNBC website, researchers found medical students' response to stress and exhaustion may lead to increased medical errors. Using a social network as a means to relieve the stress for medical students may lead to unexpected breeches in the protection of privacy for patients. Although medical residents and students are the focus of the articles, the concern for the protection of privacy is a responsibility for all of us.

Social networking websites such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* are a way for us to be interconnected any place, any time in the world. Have you ever wondered if you crossed the line? Maybe you said something you shouldn't have? According to Null and Wiggins, when you decide to enter the world of social networking, always remember, "The whole world is watching."

Brenda Wands

Brenda Wands CRNA, MBA, is a committee member and the co-chair of our community outreach program. Brenda is a member of the Department of Anesthesiology and the Assistant Director of the Nurse Anesthesia Program in collaboration with Bloomsburg University. Brenda is active in education on several committees. Her focus in bioethics is education for the community to improve health literacy.

Privacy settings are available on many of the networks, but security is certainly not a guarantee. A *YouTube* posting of a cadaver prank is one example of unprofessional behavior by medical professionals noted in the MSNBC article. Whether the cadaver is real or not is undetermined in the video but, being disrespectful of a cadaver portrays medical professionals engaging in a very unprofessional manner. As healthcare providers and professionals, we are always on stage. Social networking posts may return to haunt you years later.

In addition to personal embarrassment, what about the HIPAA law? We have all completed the required GOALS on privacy and protection. Our responsibility to adhere to the regulations of HIPAA spread from our professional role within the institution to our role as members of the community. According to a 2009 Deloitte survey, "60% of the executives surveyed felt they had a right to know how the employees portrayed the company online". Nothing posted is a secret or protected from viewing by others.

When using social networking, remember not to violate patients' privacy or misrepresent the organization. We wear several hats, one as healthcare professionals, and another as members of our community. We are advocates and professionals. HIPAA is for our protection and the protection of our patients. Remember social networking may be an acceptable avenue for relaxation, communicating, and networking, but *Facebook* and *Twitter* are not for sharing personal private information.

Respectfully Submitted,
Brenda A. Wands

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