



# SOCIAL MEDIA USE – HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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# Roadmap

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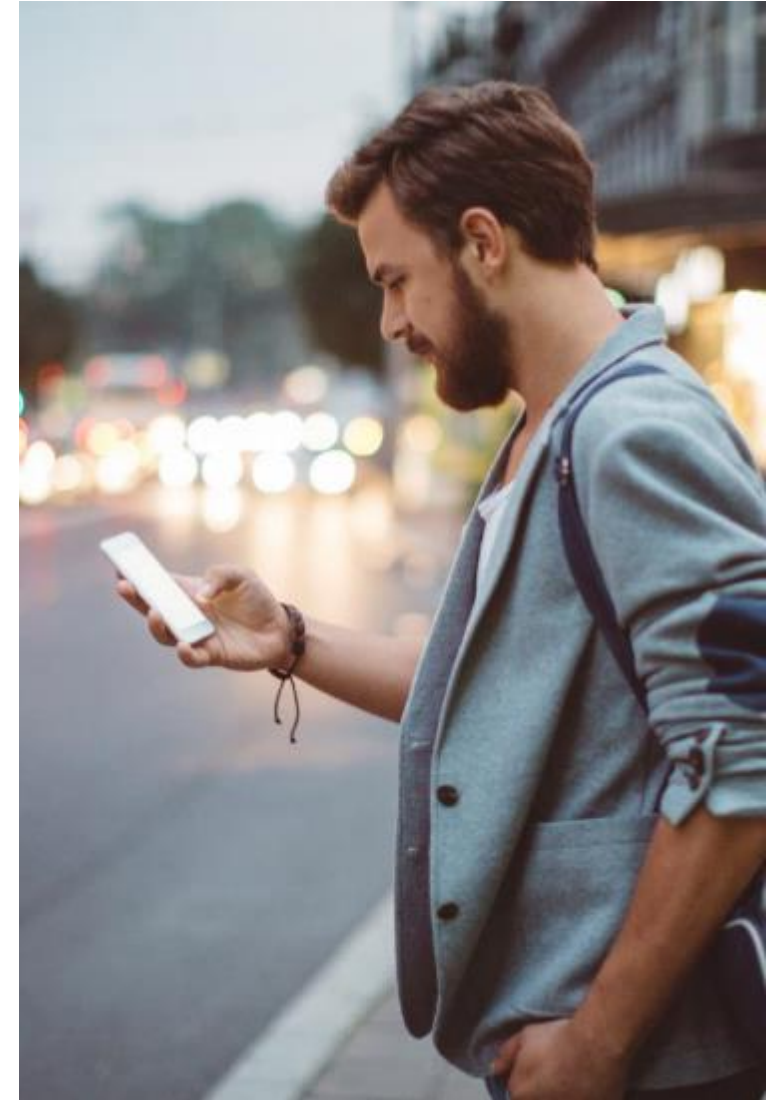
Framing the topic

Applicability to licensure → investigations  
and disciplinary cases

Recommendations

Resources

Q&A





# What is social media?

Forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. (Merriam-Webster).



- Constantly evolving
- Allows for collaboration in real time
- Social networks, blogs, video and image sharing, wikis, etc.
- Functions: social networking, professional networking, media sharing, content production, compiling information.



# Social Media Use

- 72% of US adults use some type of social media.
- Young adults continue to use social media at high levels, but usage by older adults has increased in recent years.
- Rates of social media usage by physicians is often reported as even higher.

Pew Research Center, Social Media Fact Sheet (2021), available at [www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/](http://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/)

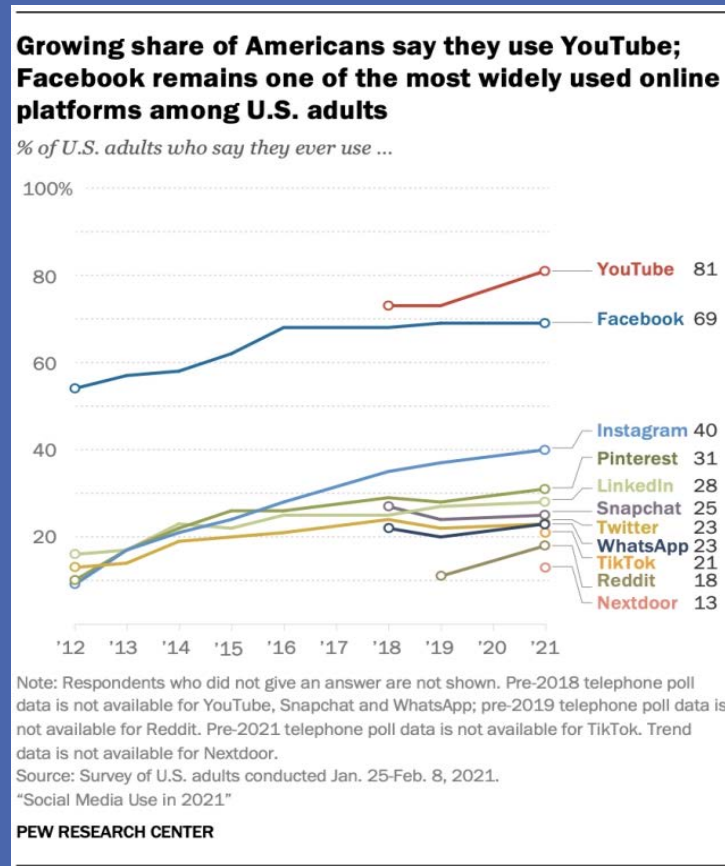
Swati Bhaskar, Examining Physician Social Media Use in 2017, PM360, May 31, 2017, [www.pm360online.com/examining-physician-use-of-social-media-in-2017/](http://www.pm360online.com/examining-physician-use-of-social-media-in-2017/)



# Common Social Media Platforms

## General

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- Instagram
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- Youtube
- Reddit
- Pinterest
- WhatsApp



## Healthcare Specific

- Sermo
- Doximity
- DailyRounds
- WeMedUp
- Figure 1
- DoctorsHangout
- MomMD
- Among Doctors
- Incision Academy
- Mayo Clinic Social Media Network

# Benefits & Risks



- Increased access to healthcare professional
- Improved and enhanced professional networking
- Continued (and greater access to) professional development and research
- Connectivity
- Higher level of transparency
- Greater reach to patients and public
- Peer-to-peer interaction
- Bolster recognition of work
- Support personal expression
- Marketing
- Tool to debate healthcare policy and practice issues



- Distribution of poor-quality or inaccurate information
- Loss of privacy
- Disclosure of protected patient information
- Loss of trust in the profession
- Patient reluctance to seek needed medical care
- Reputational damage
- Blurred boundaries
- Boundary violations
- Unrealistic expectations on availability
- Cyberbullying
- Licensing and legal issues

# Key Considerations

For healthcare professionals using social media

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*The standards of ethics and professionalism remain the same, regardless of the medium.*



Consider the purpose of the posting, its desired and expected outcomes, potential unintended outcomes, and the implications of context.



What level of privacy/security does this platform have? Does true online privacy exist? How will you maintain confidentiality?



What is your plan for when patients request to connect on social media? What is your plan for when you are asked medical questions online?



Will you be able to – and how will you – maintain the public's trust in the profession?



**Applicability to licensure →  
Investigations and disciplinary cases**

A stethoscope and a gavel are positioned on a light gray surface. The stethoscope is on the left, with its chest piece and earpieces visible. The gavel is on the right, with its head and handle visible. The background is a solid light gray color.

**Can be the basis of the complaint.  
Can be gathered during an investigation.  
Can be used as evidence in a disciplinary hearing.**

# Advertising

- Misleading, false, and fraudulent advertising
- Guaranteeing an outcome (ex. pain free)
- Failing to identify profession
- Advertising professional superiority
- Disclosing confidential information
- Failing to disclose conflicts of interest

See K.S.A. 65-2836; K.S.A. 65-2837; *Riley v. KSBHA*, 2020 WL 7413771 (Kan. Ct. App. Dec. 18, 2020); *State of Kan., ex. rel KSBHA v. Thomas*, 33 Kan.App.2d 73 (2004).



# Unprofessional Conduct and Boundaries

- Use of social media for unprofessional behavior
- Sexual misconduct
- Inappropriate communication with patients online
- Prescribing
- Violations of patient confidentiality

See K.S.A. 65-2836; K.S.A. 65-2837; *Kansas State Bd. of Healing Arts v. Foote*, 200 Kan. 447, 436 P.2d 828 (1968).

# Potential Board Action

## Non-Disciplinary, Confidential

- Letter of Concern
- Professional Development Plan (“PDP”)

## Public Disciplinary Action

- Public censure
- Fine
- Probation
- Limitation
- Suspension
- Revocation

*“The internet’s not written in pencil, it’s written in ink.”*

## Recommendations

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Do not disclose individually identifiable patient health information or post images or videos online without the express written consent of the patient. *Best practice is to avoid posting any pictures of or about specific patients.*

Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients, their surrogates, and colleagues at all times whether online or in person.

Turn down friend requests from patients to connect on social network sites. It may be acceptable to accept requests on your professional account.

Comport yourself professionally, even when communicating or posting in a personal capacity.

Consider all online content as open and accessible to anyone. And consider any social media post as permanent, even after it has been deleted.



## Recommendations

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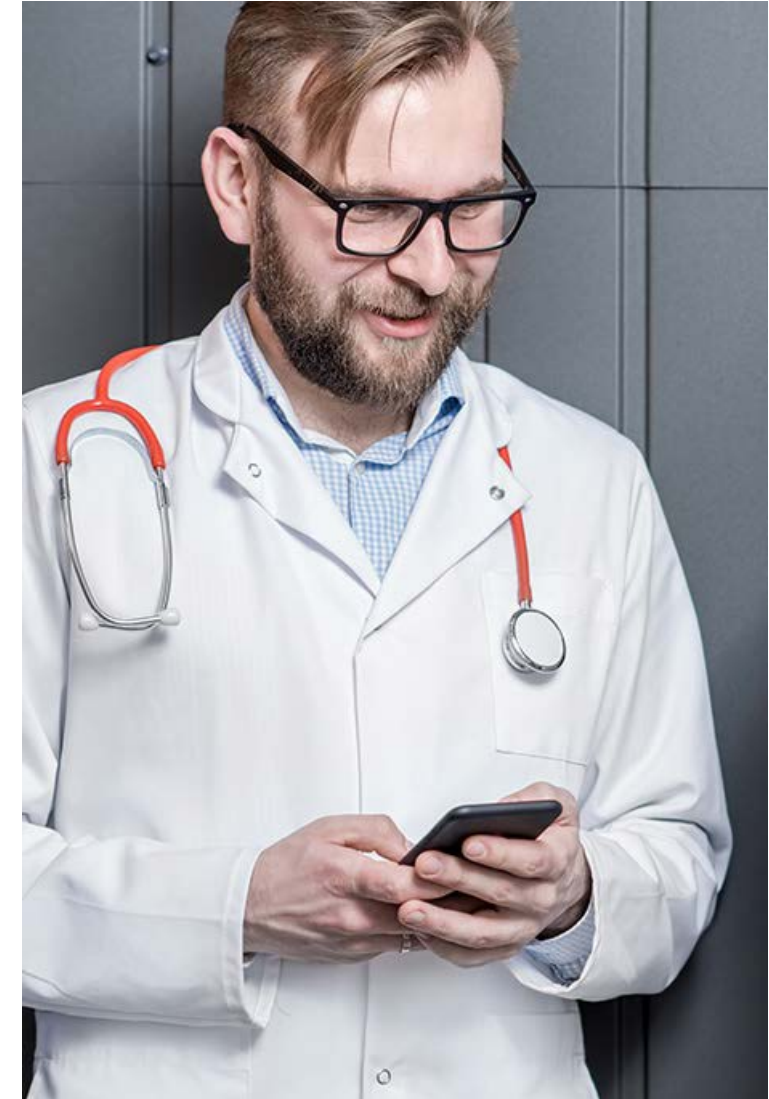
Do not provide medical advice to specific patients online, unless this is done via the secure patient portal of a practice institution.

Information provided should be truthful, not misleading or deceptive, and should be verified and supported by current literature and standard of care.

When marketing and advertising, be sure it complies with federal and state law. Consider seeking legal counsel for advice.

Identify yourself and credentials. Do not misrepresent training, expertise or credentials.

Pause. Think twice before posting.



# Resources



Federation of State Medical Boards, *Social Media and Electronic Communications*, Report and Recommendations of the FSMB Ethics and Professionalism Committee (Adopted as policy April 2019).

Practice Handbooks, *available at* [www.ksbha.org/statsandregs.shtml](http://www.ksbha.org/statsandregs.shtml)

AMA, Code of Ethics Opinion 2.3.2 Professionalism in the Use of Social Media, *available at* [www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/professionalism-use-social-media](http://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/professionalism-use-social-media);  
AOA Social Media Guidelines, *available at* <https://osteopathic.org/about/leadership/social-media-guidelines/>

Professional societies and state professional associations

C. Lee Ventola, *Social Media and Health Care Professionals: Benefits, Risks, and Best Practices*, 39 P & T 491 (2014), *available at* <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4103576>



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