

Social Media, Social Work, & Ethics: How a Social Media Policy Can Help

A Presentation for Power Conference
By Sean Erreger, LCSW

About The Presenter

- Sean Erreger, LCSW
- Practicing social worker in New York State... Started blogging to promote some clinical training and that is where the trouble started...
- www.stuckonsocialwork.com
- @stuckonsw on twitter and instagram

Learning Goals

- State 3 ways technology is impacting ethics in social work practice
- State the new Ethical and Technology Standards related to building a professional social media presence.
- Name 4 ethical considerations prior to launching a social media presence
- Name 3 benefits and 3 risks of a social media presence for social workers
- Name 5 ways having a social media policy can reduce the risk of ethical violations and/or increase fidelity to ethical practice.

Background

- Technology is creating growing ethical challenges for the field of social work. It is incumbent on us to be aware of the ways technology exposing ourselves and our clients to risks. Conversely, technology is creating opportunities for social workers.
- To reflect the growing needs of our profession, The National Association of Social Workers has updated both the “Standards of Technology for Social Work Practice” and the “Code of Ethics” to include aspects of technology.
- This training is about learning tools to balance the risks and opportunities of using the specific technology of social media.

Challenges of Professional Social Media Use

Woman Sues Northwestern After Doctor Posted Drunk Photos
August 21, 2013 at 9:30 am
Filed Under: Single Drinking, Dr. Vinaya Pappala, drunk, Elena Chernyakova, Invasion of Privacy, lawsuit, Northwestern Memorial Hospital

CHICAGO (CBS) — A former Northwestern University student is suing Northwestern Memorial Hospital and one of its doctors for invasion of privacy, after the doctor allegedly took pictures of her while she was being treated for extreme intoxication, and shared the pictures online.

Story: Brook medical student's photo with cadaver is off Facebook

Inappropriate Social Media Posts by Nursing Home Workers, Detailed

Below are details of 47 incidents since 2012 in which workers at nursing homes and assisted living centers shared photos or videos of residents on social media networks. The details come from government inspection reports, court cases and media reports.

Challenges (continued)

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/10/02/dental-practice-pays-10000-settle-social-media-disclosures-of-patients-ghi.html>

HHS.gov | U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 2, 2019

Contact: HHS Press Office
202-455-5443
media@hhs.gov

Dental Practice Pays \$10,000 to Settle Social Media Disclosures of Patients' Protected Health Information

Elie Dental Associates (Elie) has agreed to pay \$10,000 to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and to adopt a corrective action plan to settle potential violations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule. Elie is a privately-owned dental practice located in Dallas, Texas, providing general, implant, and cosmetic dentistry.

On June 5, 2019, OCR received a complaint from an Elie patient alleging that Elie had responded to a social media review by disclosing the patient's last name and details of the patient's health condition. OCR's investigation found that Elie had impermissibly disclosed the protected health information (PHI) of multiple patients in response to patient reviews on the Elie Yelp review page. Additionally, Elie did not have a policy and procedure regarding disclosures of PHI to ensure that its social media interactions protect the PHI of its patients or a Notice of Privacy Practices that complied with the HIPAA Privacy Rule. OCR accepted a substantially reduced settlement amount in consideration of Elie's size, financial circumstances, and cooperation with OCR's investigation.

"Social media is not the place for providers to discuss a patient's care," said OCR Director, Roger...

Risks of Social Media Use: Boundaries

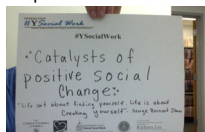
- How to separate your already established personal persona?
Your client searches for you on Facebook however they find your personal page not your professional page.
- In what ways do you represent/not represent your employer?
Your supervisor reads a post from your professional blog and feels that it is inappropriate.
- What do you want your digital footprint to say about you ?

Risks of Social Media Use: Privacy

- How do you respond to client friending?
A client attempts to connect with you on LinkedIn, how should you respond.
- Responding to crisis situations?
Someone places suicidal content on you blog, how should respond.
- When to search client information?
A client has been missing for sometime, when is it appropriate for you to search for them.

Opportunities of Social Media Use

1. Give the profession a voice.
- There is a lot of misconceptions about what social work is, we can create content to better explain what the profession is/is not.
 - A good example of this was the social media campaign #Ysocialwork Social Workers took to twitter and shared their reasons why they chose social work as a profession.



Opportunities of Social Media Use (cont.)

2. Give your organization/practice a voice to reach potential clients, other businesses, and the community. This can happen internationally, nationally, and locally.

3. Network with fellow social workers and those in other professions to continue professional development.

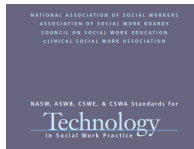
- Facebook and LinkedIn Groups. This can help develop a Personal Learning Network (PLN) where you can learn from others and also have the opportunity to share expertise.
- Participate in Twitter Chats to network with others. #MacroSW is a good resource found at... <https://macrosw.com/macrosw-twitter-chat-fags>

Opportunities of Social Media Use (cont.)

4. Help develop a professional online reputation as a subject matter expert and share content such as presentations, CEU presentations, academic accomplishments and books.

- By creating blogs and other social media content one can share their expertise in a practice area. (aka "Thought Leadership")

New Standards Related to Social Media



New Ethical Standards Related to Social Media

- **1.01 (e)** Social workers should **discuss with clients the social workers' policies** concerning the use of technology in the provision of professional services.
- **1.01 (i)** Social workers should obtain **client consent before conducting an electronic search on the client**. **Exceptions** may arise when the search is for purposes of protecting the client or other people from serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm, or for other compelling professional reasons.
- **1.04 (d)** Social workers who use technology in the provision of social work services should ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide such services in a competent manner. **This includes an understanding of the special communication challenges when using technology** and the ability to implement strategies to address these challenges.
- **1.07 (p)** Social workers should develop and inform clients about their policies, consistent with prevailing social work ethical standards, **on the use of electronic technology, including internet-based search engines, to gather information about clients**.
- **5.01** Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultation, service, legislative testimony, presentations in the community, and participation in their professional organizations.

New Standards of Technology Related to Social Media

- **Standard 2.15:** When using technology to **organize communities** and advocate, social workers shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the information shared using technological tools is honest, accurate, and respectful.
- **Standard 3.11:** **Treating Colleagues with Respect** Social workers who communicate using electronic tools shall treat colleagues with respect and shall represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of colleagues.

The Need For A Social Media Policy (Clinical)

- **Standard 2.10:** **Social workers who use social media shall develop a social media policy that they share with clients.**
- Interpretation Social media policies inform clients regarding their social worker's professional use of social networking sites, e-mail, text messaging, electronic search engines, smartphone applications, blogs, business review sites, and other forms of electronic communication. A carefully constructed social media policy that social workers share with clients can **enhance protection of private information and maintain clear boundaries**. The social media policy should be reviewed with clients during the initial interview in the social worker-client relationship and revisited and updated as needed.

The Need For A Social Media Policy (Administrative)

- **Standard 2.27: Social Media Policies** Social work administrators and supervisors shall consider developing social media policies to guide employees and volunteers who work in their organizations
- “When employees and volunteers post information on social media, that information may have an impact on their organization, whether or not that information was posted for work or personal purposes. By establishing clear social media policies, administrators and supervisors can provide employees and volunteers with guidance on how to maintain professional standards, including protection of client confidentiality, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the use of accurate and respectful language”

The Need For A Social Media Policy (Educational)

- **Standard 4.04: Social Media Policies** When using online social media for educational purposes, social work educators shall provide students with social media policies to provide them with guidance about ethical considerations.
- Interpretation: When using social media for educational purposes, it is important for students to understand how to use social media in a professional manner. The type of language, personal disclosures, and ways of communicating that student’s use for personal purposes may not be appropriate for the classroom or professional social work purposes. Social work educators should inform students about organizational policies and relevant standards related to confidentiality, demonstrating respect, academic integrity, copyright and plagiarism, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and upholding other social work ethical standards.

Questions/Considerations Prior to Launching a Social Media Presence

- What information do you want to share? Use the inherent reflective nature of social work to think about the information you are putting forward. Is this information important, harmful, protected, and so forth?
- Why do you want to share this information? Reflect on the purpose of sharing this information. What are the benefits of sharing? Is there an expected outcome from sharing this information?
- Who needs to see this information? After considering the purpose of sharing this information, think about the role of your audience. Who are the people who will benefit or need to know about this information? Will clients see this information?
- Where do I want to share this information? After determining who needs to see this information, the question of where to share this information follows. There are various social media tools that may have different or overlapping purposes. Where you share information depends on your answers to the three preceding questions.
- How does the NASW Code of Ethics or other organizational policies guide sharing this information? After determining that you are going to share this information, examine and reflect on the NASW Code of Ethics and other policies that may affect the sharing of this information?

(Source: Kimbell and Kim (2013))

BUILDING A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Case Example

“You are looking for ways to better market your private practice. After answering the above questions, you start a website, blog, and accompanying Facebook page. You share some of your favorite tips for cognitive behavioral and dialectical behavior therapy. A current client begins to comment and how should you respond?”

Clinical Social Media Policy

- **Statement of Purpose:**
- What the goal of your website/social media presence and intro of the intended audience. Address what it and is not (treatment, assessment etc)... here is an example from my social media policy...
- **Example from my blog:**
“My website is not affiliated with my current nor past employment agencies and direct social work practices. View expressed on my blog or any of my social media outlets are my own. That being said the goal of my website and social media presence is to share resources with follow professional’s mental health, healthcare, youth and education advocates. Resources on this website and all social media are never a replacement for face to face advice with a therapist or licensed medical provider.”

Clinical Social Media Policy

- **How communications will be responded to:** Friending, comments, and dual roles.

- Friending example from Dr. April Foreman:

"I do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc). I believe that adding clients as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. It may also blur the boundaries of our therapeutic relationship. If you have questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can talk more about it."

Clinical Social Media Policy

GeoLocation:

- It is important to educate clients about potential problems with Geolocation services embedded in devices/apps... Here is an example from Dr. Kelly Kolmes...

"If you used location-based services on your mobile phone, you may wish to be aware of the privacy issues related to using these services. I do not place my practice as a check-in location on various sites such as Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt, Swarm app, etc. However, if you have GPS tracking enabled on your device, it is possible that others may surmise that you are a therapy client due to regular check-ins at my office on a weekly basis. Please be aware of this risk if you are intentionally "checking in," from my office or if you have a passive LBS app enabled on your phone."



Clinical Social Media Policy

- **Use of Search:**
- Address ethical standard of 1.01(i) example taken from Dr. Keely Kolmes:

"It is NOT a regular part of my practice to search for clients on Google or Facebook or other search engines. Extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis. If I have a reason to suspect that you are in danger and you have not been in touch with me via our usual means (coming to appointments, phone, or email) there might be an instance in which using a search engine (to find you, find someone close to you, or to check on your recent status updates) becomes necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if I ever resort to such means, I will fully document it and discuss it with you when we next meet."

- In his podcast, Dr. Jonathan Singer recently describe the search standard as looking into a client's home by peering back the curtains in a living room. Prior to violating client privacy, one should think about the cause we have to do so.



Clinical Social Media Policies

- Examples to take a deeper dive..

Dr. Keely Kolmes:

<http://www.drkkolmes.com/docs/socmed.pdf>

Dr. April Foreman:

<http://www.docforeman.com/social-media-policy>

Sean Erreger, LCSW:

<http://stuckonsocialwork.com/social-media-policy/>

Administrative Social Media Policy



Administrative Social Media Policy

Case Example:

- An employee has been invited to write a blog post for the company website. It is to highlight the work in your specialized treatment area. You notice the first draft makes reference to a current client and their progress. The name has been changed but a lot of details about the clients case remain. As this employee's clinical supervisor, how should you respond?

Administrative Social Media Policy

The Duke Medical School Social Media Policy provides examples on how to address creating content for your company's social media. ...

- Does the discussion diminish the individual's role as a Duke Medicine workforce member?
- Does the discussion reflect negatively on individual's co-workers/colleagues? The individual's work unit and the organization (e.g., posting "We were very short staffed today")?
- Does the discussion conflict with Duke Medicine's mission, culture and/or values?
- Does the discussion reveal patient PHI or proprietary business information?
- Does the discussion include any information that could directly or indirectly identify a Duke Medicine patient (e.g., posting "today one of my patients died")?
- Does the discussion put the institution or individual at risk (e.g., posting "Joint Commission is here today. Hope they don't come to my unit")?

Administrative/Supervisory Considerations

- From the administrative perspective your social media is often the **face of your organization**.
- Similar to some of the clinical examples one wants to provide employees reminders about protecting confidentiality. If it is going to be used for promotional material, ensure to include social media on your informed consent for clients and employees.
- It is helpful to provide an email for the social media manager to clarify concerns both for employees and the general public.

- Some thoughts around "venting" on social media...
Like a good social worker, *be solution focused*.

Administrative: Responding to Reviews

- On the administrative side you want to be mindful for yourself and employee's responding to online reviews. Don't respond to these websites. By acknowledging the comments and any details within, you place that client's privacy at risk



- Online Reputation:

Administrative: Suicidal Content

- Both The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Crisis Text Line provide media kits to embed pictures and information...

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/media-resources/>



Crisis Text Line: (under "assets")

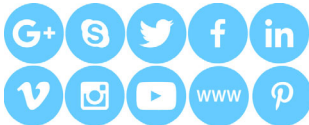
<https://www.crisistextline.org/press/>



Administrative Social Media Policy

For a deeper dive:

<https://www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/directory-of-social-media-policies/>



Educational Social Media Policy



Educational Social Media Policy

- The **Family Educational Right and Privacy Act or (FERPA)**:
- Brady, McCloud, and Young (2014) recommend
 - 1) *Instructors should become more knowledgeable of FERPA through attending institutional training*
 - 2) *Instructors should consult with their institutional experts about FERPA*
 - 3) *Instructors should design social media policies as if all students in the class may have requested that directory information be kept private*
 - 4) *Instructors should consider the potential positive gains as well as potential drawbacks in considering social media policy in the classroom*
 - 5) *Instructors should provide guidelines in the syllabus regarding how social media is to be used and for what purpose.*

Educational Social Media Policy

- After a meta-analysis of higher education social media policies (Marek, Michael & Skrabut, 2017), researchers made two recommendations. To be up front about the privacy limitations of social media sites in the syllabus. But also to mitigate privacy risk by creation of anonymous accounts. They also noted that some learning management systems mimic social media in terms of blogs and community boards.

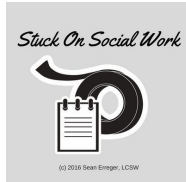
Educational Social Media Policy

- One of the leaders in the social work space about maintaining boundaries and privacy is Dr. Laurel Hitchcock...
- 1) Tips on digital and social media management from the educator perspective:
<http://www.laureliversonhitchcock.org/2016/02/12/my-guidelines-for-using-digital-social-tech-in-the-classroom-and-beyond/>
- 2) Also Dr. Hitchcock and her colleague Allison Currington developed a guide of *best practices for field instructors*:
<http://www.laureliversonhitchcock.org/2017/07/28/social-media-toolkit-for-social-work-field-educators-get-your-free-copy/>

??? Questions ???

Email: StuckOnSW@gmail.com

Website: www.stuckonsocialwork.com



References

Brady, S. R., McLeod, D. A., & Young, J. A. (2015). Developing ethical guidelines for creating social media technology policy in social work classrooms. *Advances in Social Work, 16*(1), 43-54.

Duke Medical School. (2017) *Social Media Policy Q and A*. Found at https://medschool.duke.edu/sites/default/files/field/attachments/Social%20Media%20Policy%20FAQs_3_15_17.pdf

Hitchcock, L (2017) "My Guidelines for Using Social Media in Digital and Social Tech in The Classroom and Beyond" On 12/13/17 found at: <http://www.laurelversonhitchcock.org/2016/02/12/my-guidelines-for-using-digital-social-tech-in-the-classroom-and-beyond>

National Association of Social Workers. (2017) *Code of Ethics*. Found at: <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

National Association Of Social Workers. (2017) *Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice*. Found at: https://www.socialworkers.org/includes/newincludes/homepage/PRA-01033617techstandards_FINAL_POSTING.pdf

Kimball, E. & Kim, J. (2013). Virtual boundaries: Ethical considerations for use of social media in social work. *Social Work, 58*(2), 185-188. Found on 12/15/17 at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ericka_Kimball/publication/237000878_Virtual_Boundaries_Ethical_Considerations_for_Use_of_Social_Media_in_Social_Work/links/5573664313cad00000000000/Virtual-Boundaries-Ethical-Considerations-for-Use-of-Social-Media-in-Social-Work.pdf

References (cont.)

Kolmes, K. (2018) *Social Media Policy*. (webpage) found at <http://www.drkkolmes.com/docs/socmed.pdf>

Marek, Michael & Skrabut, Stan. (2017). Privacy in Educational use of Social Media in the U.S. *International Journal of E-Learning, 16*, 265-286. Found at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Marek/publication/300080104_Privacy_in_Educational_Use_of_Social_Media_in_the_US/links/5709067a08a660813583ac.pdf

Robb, M. (2011) Pause Before Posting – Using Social Media Responsibly. *Social Work Today*. Vol. 11 No. 1 P. 8 Found at: <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/020911p8.shtml>

Robbins, S. P., & Singer, J. B. (2014). From the editor—The medium is the message: Integrating social media and social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(3), 387-390. Found at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10437797.2014.916957>

Singer, J. B. (Producer). (2018, January 3). #113 - 2018 NASW Code of Ethics (Part1): Interview with Allan Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD [Audio Podcast]. *Social Work Podcast*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkpodcast.com/2018/01/Ethics2018-1.html>

University of Buffalo School of Social Work. (2013, Nov. 23) [Video File]. How to use social media and technology to develop a Personal Learning Network. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Chthos6Qio>
