Management Faculty Research   Management, Marketing and MIS

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How Could, Should, and Would Physicians use Facebook with Patients

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How Could, Should, and Would Physicians Use Facebook With Patients?

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Impact of Social Media on Medical Field

- At least 33% of US adults use Facebook or health-focused social media sites to seek health information

- As of 2013:

  - 1501 hospitals using social media
  - 1264 with Facebook sites
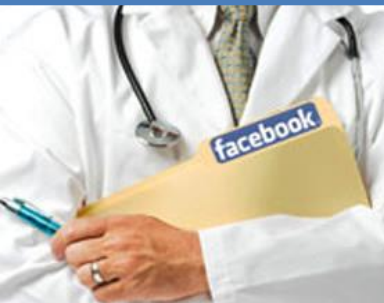
Impact of Social Media on Medical Field

✦ Healthcare industry has been slow to embrace IT and social media

✶ Concerns about privacy

✶ Concerns about professionalism

✦ Medical associations (e.g. AMA) have developed guidelines for social media use

✦ BUT greater assistance needs to be provided to physicians

Purpose of our Research

- Potential benefits of social media
  - **"Could You?"**
- Possible risks for participating in such forums
  - **"Should You?"**
- Show how physicians and HC organizations are actually using social media
  - **"Would You?"**
- Examine how physicians, patients, and public feel about interfacing via Facebook

"Could You?"

Benefits: "Could You?"

✦ Patient engagement

✦ Meeting patient expectations and improve service

✦ Disseminating health information to general public

✦ Communication in crisis situation

✦ Marketing of brand and PR

✦ Staff engagement

"Should You?"

Risks: "Should You?"

✦ Breaches of confidential patient information

✦ Lack of professionalism

✦ Crossing therapeutic boundaries

✦ Geographic boundaries/licensing

✦ Misinterpretation of medical advice

✦ Conflicts of interest

Concerns about Use of Social Media

✦ Privacy and patient confidentiality

  ✶ 2 nurses posting patient X-ray

  ✶ Hospital employees posting photo of mortally wounded victim

  ✶ 5 nurses discussing patient information

  ✶ Physician posting information about trauma patient

  ✶ Nurse posting photo of herself in surgery room holding piece of patient's flesh
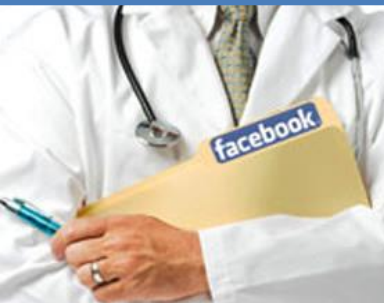
Concerns about Use of Social Media

✦ Professionalism

✳ Medical students

✦ Only 35% using privacy settings

✦ Over 50% medical schools found evidence of students' online unprofessional conduct

✦ Lack of awareness of ramifications

✳ Newly trained doctors

✦ 60% had restricted profiles

✦ Other 40% were unrestricted and contained personal information about alcohol use and personal relationships

Concerns about Use of Social Media

✦ Professional boundaries

  ✶ Many healthcare professionals see this as problematic

  ✶ "We need professional boundaries to do our job well"

  ✶ "Being 'friends' on Facebook damages the therapeutic relationship"

  ✶ Similar concerns exist for other relationships in the workplace that cross authority boundaries (e.g. supervisor-nurse, physician-nurse)

"Would You?"

Actual Use: "Would You?"

✦ Limited empirical data

  ✴ 220 young physicians in NZ
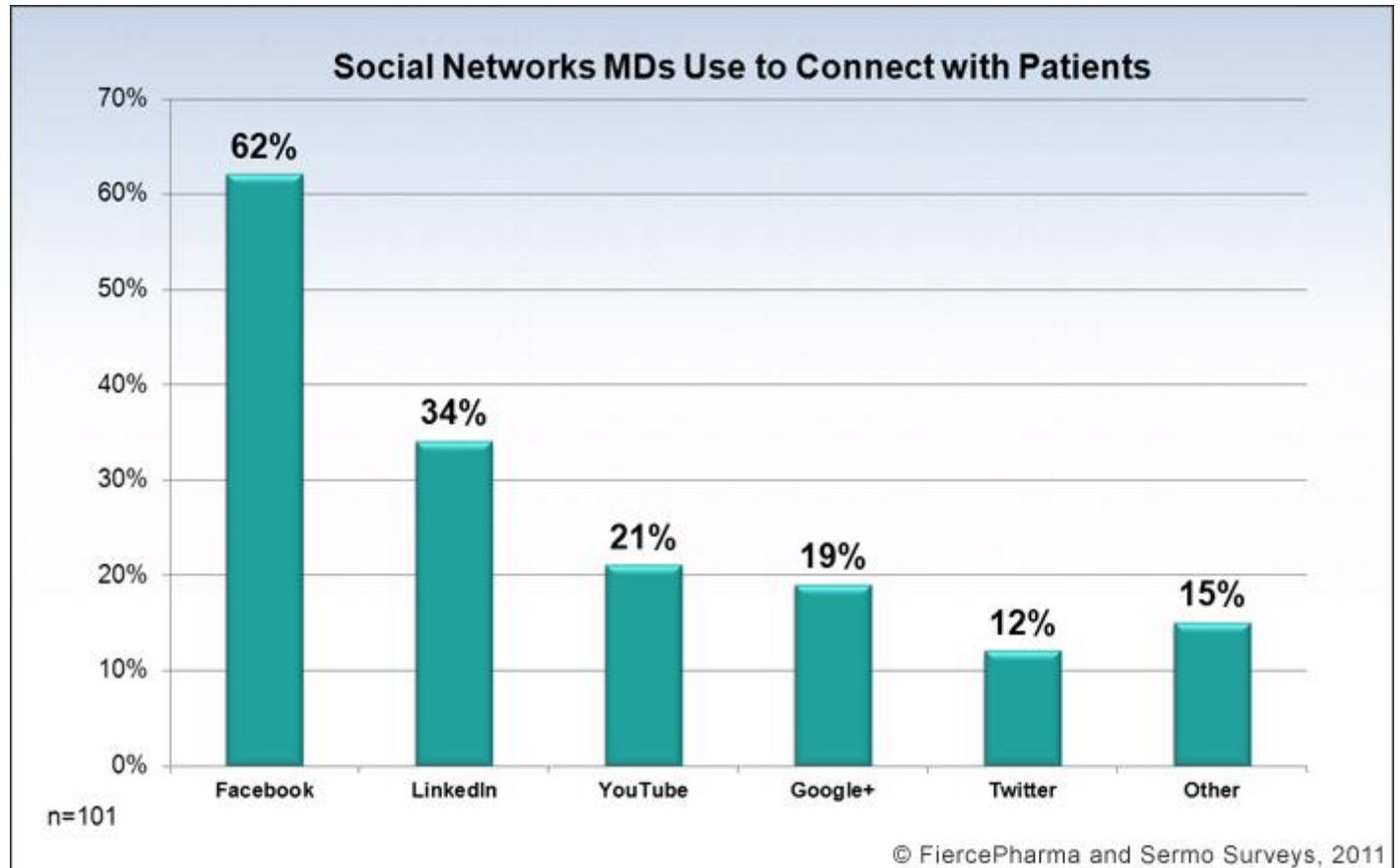
    ✦ 40% did not use privacy settings and posted information that could negatively impact patient-physician relationship

  ✴ 202 residents at hospital in France

    ✦ 73% had Facebook profile

    ✦ 85% would decline patient "friend" request, other 15% would handle case-by-case

    ✦ 48% thought relationship with patient would change if patient knew of Facebook profile, but 76% thought only if patient had access to profile
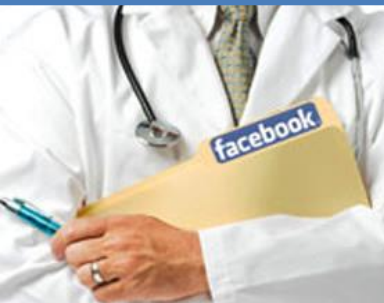
Use of Social Media

Social Networks MDs Use to Connect with Patients

- Facebook: 62%
- LinkedIn: 34%
- YouTube: 21%
- Google+: 19%
- Twitter: 12%
- Other: 15%

n=101

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METHODS

Data Collection and Sample

✦ Searched for online discussion boards using search terms: **physicians, patients, "friending"** and **Facebook**

  ✶ Found 37 discussion boards focusing on:

    ✦ Should physicians use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)?

    ✦ Should physicians and patients be "friends" on Facebook?

  ✶ 349 contributors

    ✦ 91 physicians
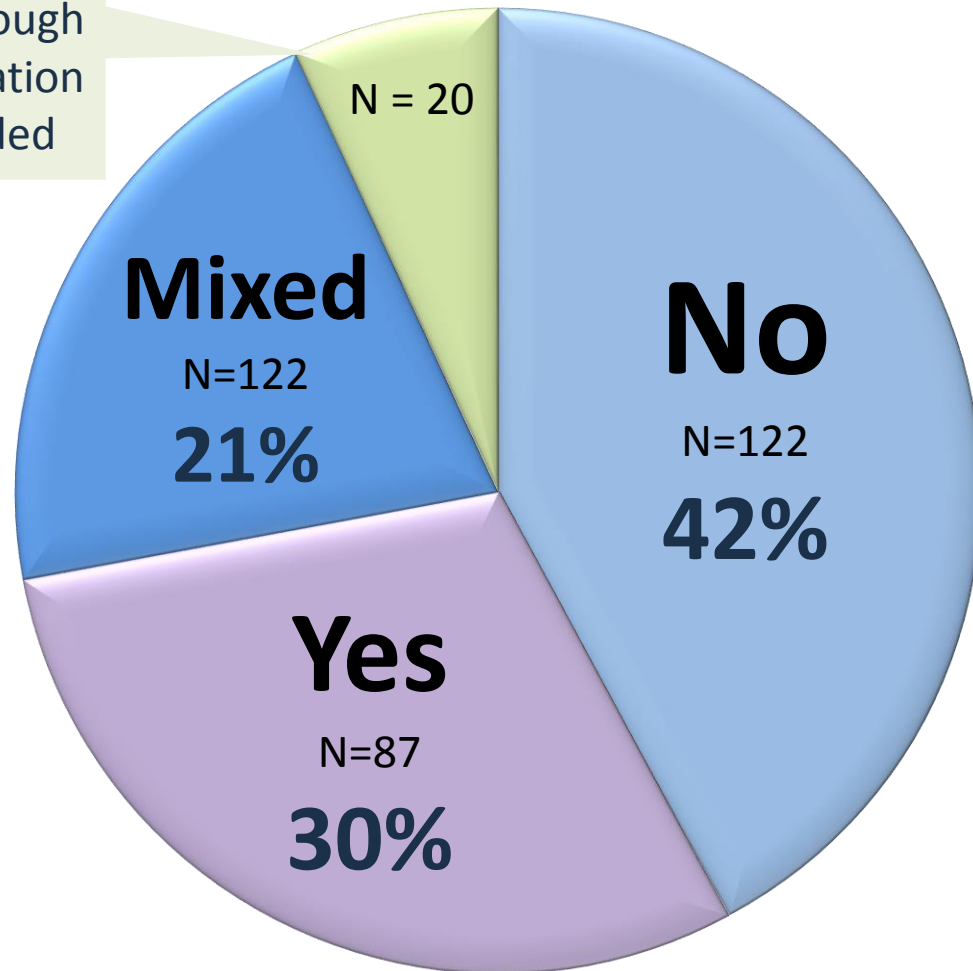
    ✦ 71 patients

    ✦ 183 information not available

Qualitative Content Analysis

✦ 11 themes

✦ Two evaluators independently coded each of the contributor's comments.

  ✶ Differences were discussed and 100 % agreement reached.

✦ 58 irrelevant comments were eliminated

✦ Final N = 290

  ✶ 178 re: friending between physicians and patients
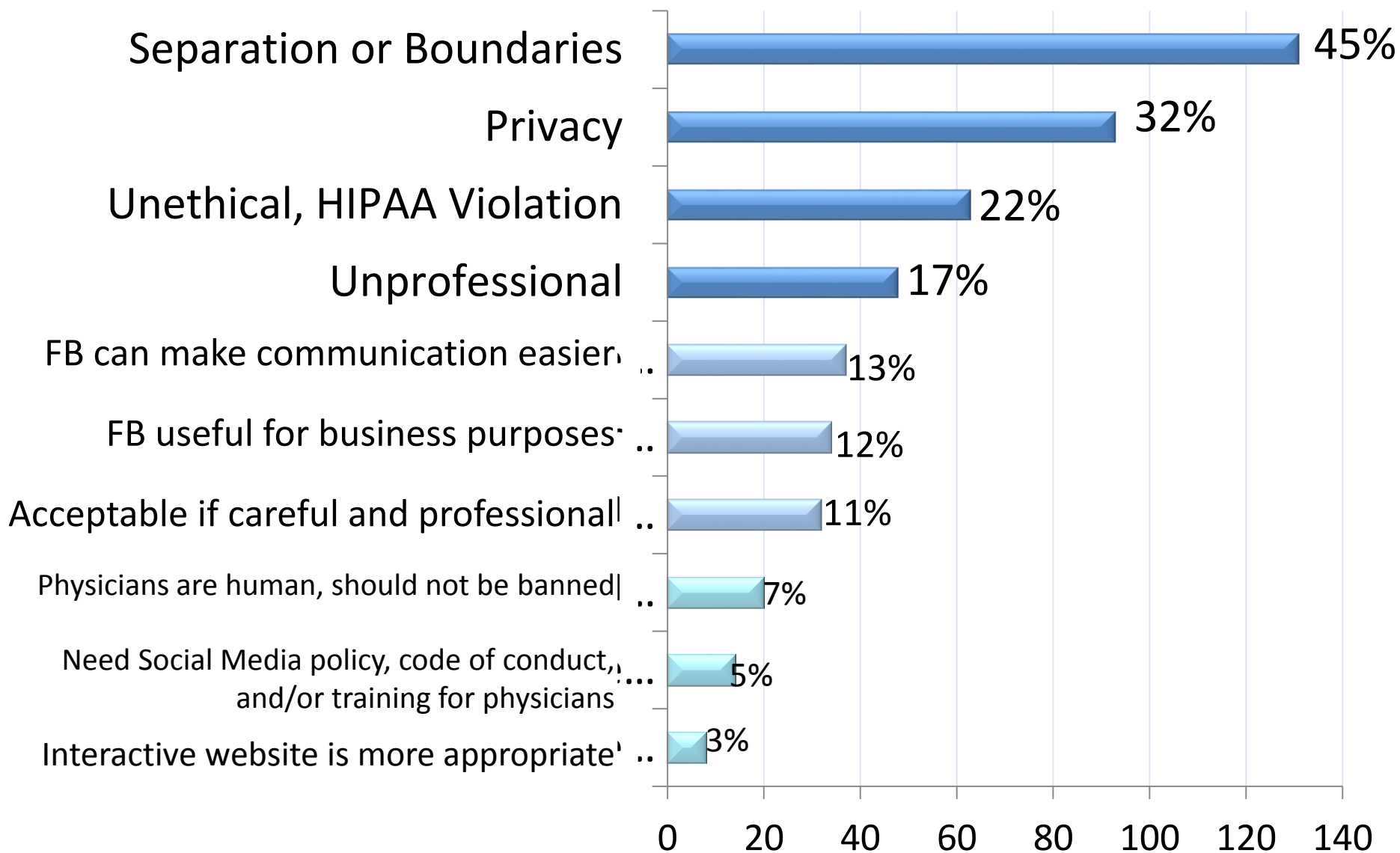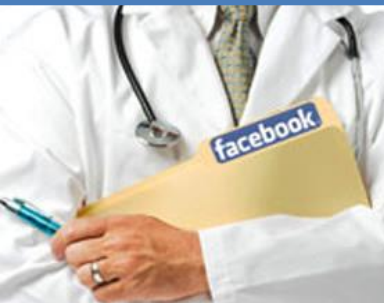
  ✶ 112 re: physicians having a Facebook profile

Should physicians use Facebook?

Not enough information provided

N = 20

Mixed
N=122
21%

No
N=122
42%

Yes
N=87
30%

Common Themes or Reasons Given as to Why Physicians Should or Should Not Use Facebook

Theme	Percentage
Separation or Boundaries	45%
Privacy	32%
Unethical, HIPAA Violation	22%
Unprofessional	17%
FB can make communication easier..	13%
FB useful for business purposes...	12%
Acceptable if careful and professional..	11%
Physicians are human, should not be banned..	7%
Need Social Media policy, code of conduct,... and/or training for physicians	5%
Interactive website is more appropriate...	3%

Sample Comment RE: Separation/Boundaries and Privacy

✦ *Too many of society's necessary **boundary** lines – those between health care professionals and their patients, for instance – are going the way of the dinosaur. Some of us seem to feel that we have nothing to hide and if we make our lives an open book, we'll be rewarded for being "transparent and honest". What we're really being is naïve. There is no reward involved but complete loss of **privacy**.*
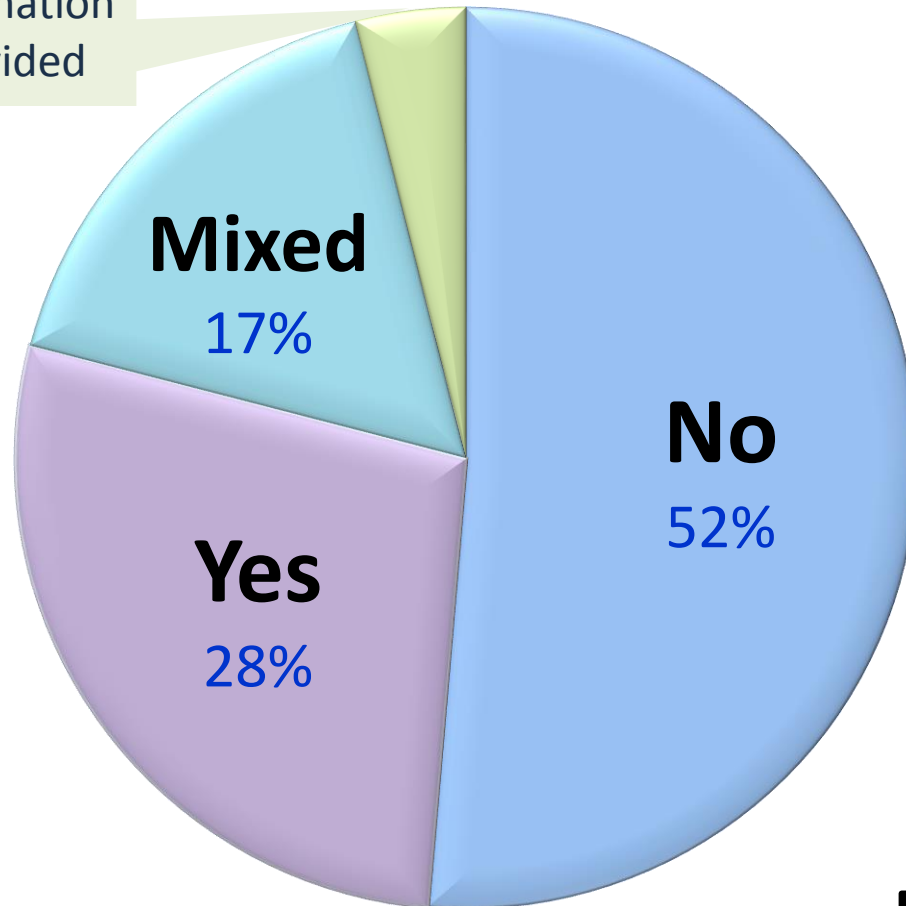
Sample Comment Re: HIPAA

✦ *Blurring the lines between personal and professional relationships is very risky, and any doctor who does that is a fool . . Of greater consideration is confidentiality; doctors may be tempted to have professional discussions on an extremely public medium. Doing anything like that goes smack in the face of HIPAA, opening up doctors to lawsuits they would surely lose.*
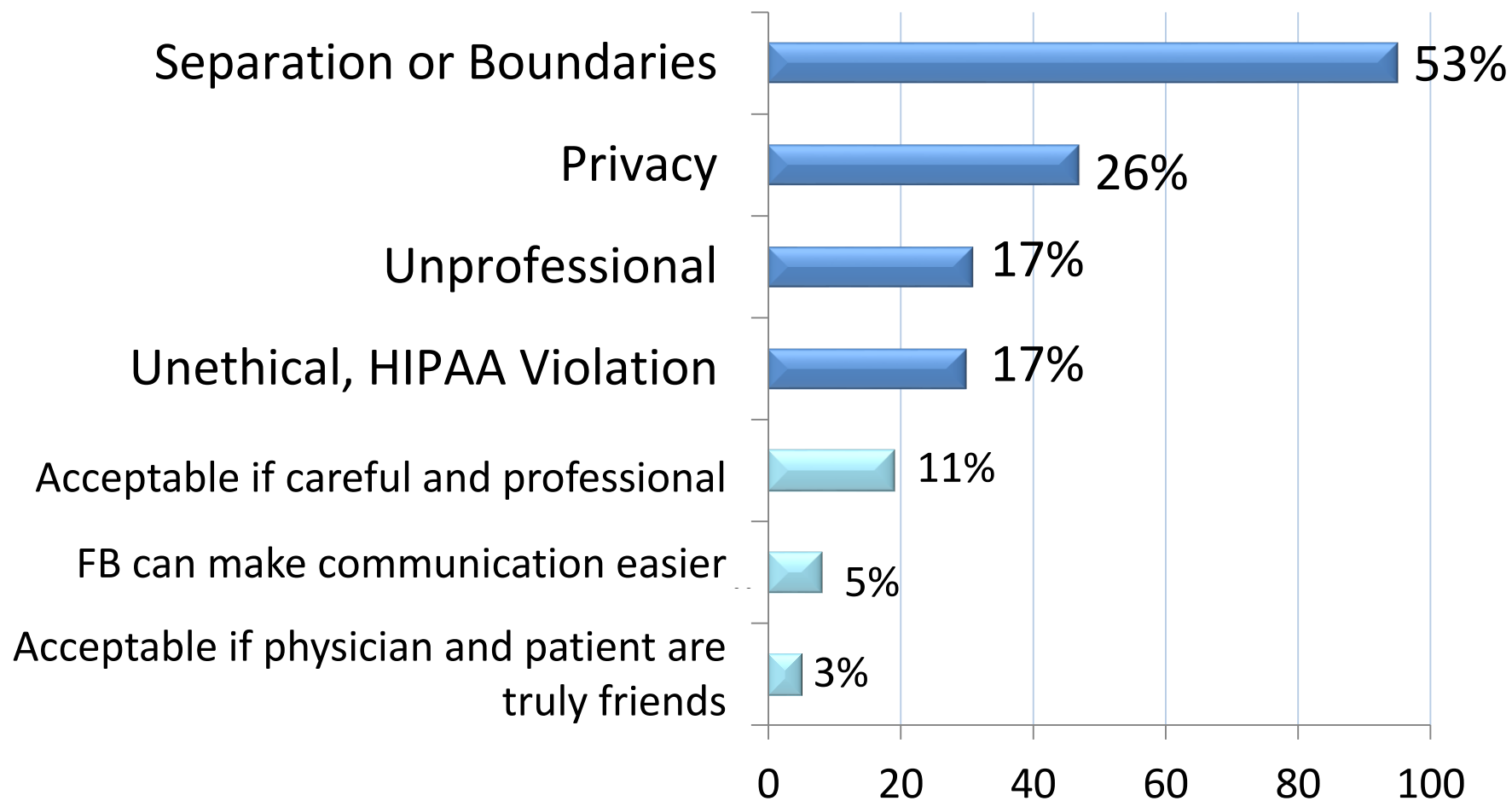
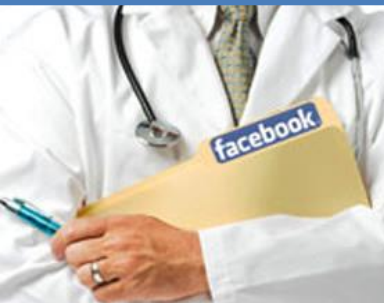# Should Physicians be Facebook "Friends" with their Patients?

Not enough information provided

Mixed 17%

No 52%

Yes 28%

N = 178

Separation/Boundaries

- **AGAINST:** *I am a doctor, I keep my privacy settings high and I am careful what I say. I would be surprised if a patient had never checked my profile, but OF COURSE I would never accept a patient as a friend. It would be a serious breach of professional boundaries.*

- **MIXED:** *When it comes to doctor-patient interaction on social networking sites, the same separation of work and play should apply. Can a doctor be friends with a patient? Of course. . . . However, a line needs to be drawn between social communication and professional medical communication.*

- **FOR:** *I object to the comment that doctors can't be friends with patients. Long before Facebook, physicians built their practices through their friends and friends of friends. If you can't have your friends as patients, whom are you supposed to have? Your enemies?*

Discussion

Major Findings

✦ Considerable resistance among both physicians and patients as to using Facebook for healthcare purposes.

✦ Why?

  ✴ Privacy

  ✴ Need to maintain professional boundaries in the physician-patient relationship

Implications

✦ Healthcare organizations should discourage physicians from "friending" patients on Facebook

  ✦ either party may access personal information that could harm the therapeutic relationship

✦ Healthcare organizations should seek other forms of social media

Social Media = Opportunity

✦ Better communication on benefits of social media needed

✦ Healthcare organizations need to ensure social media is

  ✴ Useful

  ✴ Trustworthy

Minimize Risks

✦ Develop social media policy

 ✶ Readability Important

  ✦ Clear

  ✦ Well-organized

  ✦ Consequences of violation included

✦ Provide education/training

Limitations

✦ Unable to determine demographic characteristics

✦ Online contributors may be relatively young

Conclusion

- **Could you?**
  - "Based on the latest studies on social media and healthcare, hospitals will not be in the group of survivors in 5-10 years, unless they move forward in this area . . . progressive CEOs are recognizing the importance of having a social media and online presence."
- **Should you?**
  - Yes, BUT only so long as there is social media **policy** and **training**
- **Would you?**
  - Proactive steps needed to minimize physician and patient resistance