Professionalism and Social Networking: Can Patients, Physicians, Nurses, and Supervisors all be ‘friends’?
Professionalism and Social Networking: Can Patients, Physicians, Nurses, and Supervisors all be ‘friends’?

- Dr. Joy Peluchette
  - University of Wollongong
- Dr. Katherine Karl
  - University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
- Dr. Alberto Coustasse
- Dr. Philip Rutsohn
- Dr. Dennis Emmett
  - Marshall University
Social Media Use

- Facebook
  - Most popular of all social networking sites---500 million users in 2010
  - "Greying" of user demographics
  - Estimated that over 50% healthcare employees use social media
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

© FiercePharma and Sermo Surveys, 2011
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

- 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

✦ Professional boundaries
  ✦ Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation
  ✦ “onstage” vs. “backstage”
  ✦ Virtual world blurs these boundaries
  ✦ Some healthcare professionals comfortable with this
  ✦ “Doctors have been friends with patients even before the internet started. The potential conflicts of interest have always been there...they are just now amplified”
Concerns about Use of Social Media

- Professional boundaries
  - Other 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)
Hypotheses

★ H1: CRNAs will have greater concerns about supervisors, physicians, faculty, and patients viewing profile information as opposed to classmates, friends, and family members.
Hypotheses

- **H2**: CRNAs would be less likely to accept a ‘friend’ request from their supervisor than physician that they work with and least likely to accept such a request from a patient.

- **H3**: CRNAs would be less likely to initiate a ‘friend’ request to their supervisor, physician or patient.
Sample

- 103 students enrolled in doctoral CRNA program at US university
- All with at least 2 years work experience in critical care
- 62% females
- 93% Caucasian
- 78% between ages of 20-39
  - 35% (25-29) and 16% (30-34)
Survey

- Concerns about various parties (e.g. supervisor, family) seeing their profile
- Items on profile they would not want current or prospective employers to see
- Observations of unprofessional conduct on classmates’ profiles
Survey

- Responses to hypothetical ‘friend’ requests from supervisor, patient, and physician
  - Accept, accept with reservations (why?), or ignore (why?)
- Reports of ‘friend’ requests initiated to supervisor, patient or physician
Results

- Partial support for H1
  - No concerns about family, friends, or classmates seeing profile
  - Neutral about faculty, physicians, and employers seeing profile
  - Some concerns about patients or strangers seeing profile

21% indicated concerns about employers seeing photos (mostly of alcohol use) and 10% concerned about comments (profanity or comments by friends)
Results

- 30% reported observing unprofessional content on classmates’ profiles

- Most common
  - Intoxication or substance abuse (N=21)
  - Profanity (N=16)
  - Sexually suggestive photos/comments (N=11)

- Less common
  - Negative work-related comments (N=6)
  - Discriminatory language (N=4)
  - Negative comments about faculty (N=4)
Results

- Most would accept ‘friend’ request from boss (46%) or physician they work with (61%) but ignore request from patient (81%)

- Partial support for H2
  - Within-subjects comparison of means using ANOVA with repeated measures on source of ‘friend’ request
  - Most favorable response to request from physician, followed by boss and least favorable response to request from patient
Results

- No support for H3
  - 37% had initiated ‘friend’ request to boss and 40% to a physician they work with
  - Only 1 person had initiated request to patient

- Qualitative data
  - Reservations---depends on relationship with person (45%)
  - Ignore---need for separation (31%), viewed as unprofessional (31%), privacy (16%)
  - Initiated request---real friend (76%)
  - Not initiated---not Facebook user (39%), unprofessional (37%), separation (33%)
Implications

- Need for organizational policies and professional guidelines to aid healthcare workers
- Care in how healthcare institutions use such social media
- Healthcare educators have responsibility to prepare students with regard to professionalism and privacy
Limitations & Future Research

- ‘friend’ requests were fictitious---real responses may be different
- Sample was relatively young and sample size was small---future studies should target larger, more diverse healthcare sample
- Limited to CRNAs in USA---future studies should extend to healthcare setting in other countries