



State Medical Board of  
**Ohio**



## Social Media & Digital Communication Guidelines

Participation in social media is, for many, a personal activity. However, given the potential impact that engagement in social media can have on a health care professional's practice, the care of their patients or clients, and the profession as a whole, personal use can often extend into the professional domain.

Any attempt at determining the appropriate use of social media and electronic communication should begin by considering the same scenario in the absence of social media and electronic communication. The standards of ethics and professionalism should be the same, regardless of the medium.

Guidelines for Social Media Use and Electronic Communications:

- Do not disclose individually identifiable patient health information or post images or videos online without the express written consent of the patient.
- Be mindful of and remain in compliance with all relevant professional and legal responsibilities, as well as policies and guidelines in Ohio.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients and their surrogates, as well as colleagues at all times, whether online or in person.
- Politely turn down requests from patients/clients to connect on social networking sites. It may be acceptable to accept requests on professional accounts, provided that the account is used for professional purposes only.
- Communicate and engage in social media in personal and professional settings with civility and respect for others.
- Conduct yourself professionally, even when communicating or posting in a personal capacity. If you discover unprofessional or inappropriate content online posted by a professional colleague, notify the individual so that they may remove the post or change their methods of communicating. If the situation does not improve, report the behavior to the state medical board or other relevant authority.
- Do not engage in disruptive behavior online such as cyberbullying, and report instances of such behavior by professional colleagues to the state medical board or other relevant authority.
- Consider all online content as open and accessible to anyone, regardless of whether it is posted in a closed or private forum and regardless of privacy settings and levels of encryption used.
- Consider any social media post as permanent, even after it has been deleted.

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- Be mindful of how and where you use devices, often referred to as AI Assistants, that record conversations, such as Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google's Google Assistant and Microsoft's Cortana. If these devices are kept in clinical areas, they should be turned off or their settings changed in order that they do not record patient health information.
- Do not provide medical advice to specific patients online, unless this is done via the secure patient portal of a practice or institution.
- When discussing general medical issues online, identify yourself as a physician and avoid being anonymous (i.e., provide your name). Do not misrepresent your training, expertise or credentials.
- When marketing your practice online, be sure to adhere to codes of conduct with respect to advertising.
- Be transparent about any conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.
- Think twice before posting. If you would not comment publicly in your professional or personal capacity, do not do so online.
- Consider innovative ways in which social media can enhance your practice, career, or patient care that reflect sound ethical and professional principles.

The State Medical Board of Ohio has the authority to discipline licensees for unprofessional behavior relating to the inappropriate use of social media and electronic communication. Board actions range from a letter of concern to the revocation of a license. Examples of unprofessional behavior can include:



- Inappropriate communication with patients online
- Online sexual misconduct
- Use of the internet for unprofessional behavior
- Online misrepresentation of credentials
- Online violations of patient confidentiality
- Failure to reveal conflicts of interest online
- Online derogatory remarks regarding a patient or other medical professional
- Online depiction of intoxication
- Discriminatory language or practices online

State Medical Board of Ohio's Best Practices for Social Media Use and Electronic Communications are based on the Social Media and Electronic Communications Report and Recommendations of the FSMB Ethics and Professionalism Committee Adopted as policy by the Federation of State Medical Boards April 2019. Ohio licensees are encouraged to read the full report as it contains important information on ethical implications of social media as well as use cases for social media and electronic communication.

[med.ohio.gov/Resources/Social-Media-Guidelines](https://med.ohio.gov/Resources/Social-Media-Guidelines)