UTMB's Guide for Social Media Do's and Don'ts

Introduction

UTMB understands the role of social media as a way to facilitate communication amongst our university community and the world. Social media use is increasingly common and evolving just as rapidly. It can also carry just as many risks as benefits. That's why users of these powerful communications tools need to always be aware that they can, and do, have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations.

This document is intended to provide members of UTMB's university community with additional information on how to be a good online community member. It's meant to enhance understanding of UTMB IHOP Policy 2.19.7 Use of Social Media and provide suggestions on how to protect personal and professional reputations while using social media.

What is Social Media

According to Merriam-Webester.com social media is defined as forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). Wikipedia, one of the most widely used social media sites, categorizes the predominant uses of social media as:

- **Communication** (blogs, micro-blogs, social networking and events)
- **Collaboration** (like wikis, social news and bookmarking/tagging)
- **Multimedia** (video, photography, music/audio sharing and presentation sharing and livecasting)
- **Review and opinion** (product reviews, business reviews, community Q&A)
- **Entertainment** (media platforms, virtual worlds and game sharing)

Social Media Tips

If you use on-line social networks, whether for work or fun, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- **Did I set my privacy setting to help control who can look at my profile, my information and photos?** You can limit access somewhat but not completely, and you have no control over what someone else may share or do with your postings. Once you post information it is public and may be shared without your permission or knowledge.

- **How much information do I want people who I don't know to know about me?** If I give them my cell phone number, address, email, class schedule, a list of possessions….. How might they use it? With whom will they share it? Not everyone will respect my personal or physical space.

- **Would I post this material on a roadside billboard or to the exterior of the door to my residence?** Can this information be hurtful? Would I be embarrassed to say this to someone's face?

- **Is the image I'm projecting by my materials and photos the one I want my current and future friends to know me by?** What does my profile say to potential faculty members/advisors? Future graduate school/internship interviewers? Potential employers? Neighbors? Family? Parents? Which doors am I opening? Which am I closing?

- **What if I change my mind about what I post?** For instance, what if I want to remove something I posted as a joke or to make a point? Have I read the social networking site's privacy and caching statements? Removing material from network caches can be difficult. Posted material remains accessible on the internet until you've completed the prescribed process for removing information from the caching technology of one or multiple (potentially unknown) search engines.

- **Have I asked permission to post someone else's image or information? Am I infringing on their privacy?** Could I be hurting someone? Could I be subject to libel suits? Am I violating network use policy? Could I be subject to a judiciary hearing?

- **Does my equipment have spyware and virus protections installed?** Did you know that many social networking sites collect profile information to SPAM you. Others contain links that can infect your equipment with viruses that potentially can destroy data and infect others with whom you communicate. Remember to backup your work on an external source in case of destructive attacks.

Best Practices

Everyone who participates in social media activities should understand and follow these simple but important best practices:

1. **Take Responsibility and Use Good Judgment.** You are responsible for the material you post on personal blogs or other social media. Be courteous, respectful, and thoughtful about how other members of the university community, including our patients and students, may perceive or be affected by postings. Incomplete, inaccurate, inappropriate, threatening, harassing or poorly worded postings may be harmful to others. They may damage relationships, undermine UTMB's brand or reputation, discourage teamwork, and negatively impact the institution's commitment to patient care, education, research, and community service.

2. **Think Twice Before You Post.** Anything you post is highly likely to be permanently connected to you and your reputation through Internet and email archives. Future employers can often have access to this information and may use it to evaluate you. Take great care and be thoughtful before placing your identifiable comments in the public domain. If you wouldn't say it to someone in the media or post it on a billboard, you probably shouldn't post it online.

3. **Protect Patient Privacy.** Disclosing information about patients without written permission, including photographs or potentially identifiable information, is strictly prohibited. You also need to be aware that de-identifying is a slippery slope, so when in doubt leave it out…. These rules also apply to deceased patients and to

posts even in the secure section of your Facebook page (that's the section that's accessible by approved friends only). You should never use social media for activities like communicating appointment reminders, prescription refills, and the like either to the patient directly or by posting to their wall.

4. **Protect Your Own Privacy**. Make sure you understand how the privacy policies and security features work on the sites where you are posting material.

5. **Respect Work Commitments.** Although IHOP Policy 2.19.6 Information Resources Security allows for incidental use of information resources, you should make sure that your blogging, social networking, and other external media activities do not interfere with your work commitments.

6. **Identify Yourself When Speaking Officially.** Users who are authorized to speak on behalf of UTMB should identify themselves by: 1) Full Name; 2) Title; 3) Department; and 4) Contact Information, when posting or exchanging information on Social Media forums (in their official capacity), and shall address issues only within the scope of their specific authorization.

7. **Use a Disclaimer.** Where your connection to UTMB is apparent but you're stating your personal opinion, make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of UTMB. A disclaimer, such as, " The contents, including all opinions and views expressed, in my profile (or on my page) are entirely personal and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of anyone else, including other employees in my department or at the University of Texas Medical Branch." may be appropriate.

8. **Respect Copyright and Fair Use Laws**. For UTMB's protection as well as your own, it is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including UTMB's own copyrights and brands.

9. **Protect Proprietary Information**. Do not share confidential or proprietary information that may compromise UTMB's business practices or security. Similarly, do not share information in violation of any laws or regulations.

10. **Seek Expert Guidance.** Consult with the Office of Public Affairs if you have any questions about the appropriateness of materials you plan to publish or if you require clarification on whether specific information has been publicly disclosed before you disclose it publicly. Social media may generate interest from the press. If you are contacted by a member of the media about a UTMB related blog posting or UTMB information of any kind, contact the Office of Public Affairs at (409) 772-2618 or public.affairs@utmb.edu.

Use-Case Examples

The following are fictional use-case examples of social media and blogging activities and an explanation of their appropriateness under UTMB's Use of Social Media Policy and Guide to Social Media Do's and Don'ts:

1. **A patient attempts to "friend" his healthcare provider on Facebook.** As a UTMB employee, you are required to maintain a professional relationship with our patients

and their families. "Friending" a patient, and/or their family member is strongly discouraged – this is especially true in the case of minor patients. Exception is made in cases where if an established friendship existed before the provider-patient relationship or if the provider-patient relationship has ended. In any of these scenarios, including after the provider-patient relationship has ended, it would be inappropriate to discuss health-related information. (Best Practice 3)

2. **A UTMB faculty member wants to use Facebook to communicate with students.** As an educator, you are required to maintain a professional relationship with your students; social media can be an excellent communication tool between faculty and students. UTMB encourages those faculty members who use social media to interact with students to create a separate account for professional use rather than use a personal account. Use of a separate professional account for communication between you and your students helps maintain appropriate boundaries.

3. **A patient comments on a UTMB employee's blog and discloses protected health information with the expectation that the UTMB employee will continue the discussion.** Social media discussion with a patient should not address health concerns of individual patients. The employee should not engage in these conversations with patients even when the patient initiates the conversation. (Best Practice 3)

4. **A UTMB student "twitters" that he just finished rounds with the residents on a patient and describes the clinical findings of that patient.** It is difficult to be certain that information disclosed in the Twitter® post is not identifiable to that particular patient. The best type of posting would include very general information. Other posts by the same student could indicate his/her medical school and current rotation, leading to circumstances that indirectly identify the patient, such as by naming a very rare disease. Remember, when in doubt leave it out… (Best Practice 3)

5. **A UTMB student writes in her blog, naming an attending physician who did minimal teaching on rounds and recommending that other students not take clinical electives with that physician.** Legitimate critique of an educational activity is appropriate, so long as professionalism is maintained. There are more effective and less public mechanisms for relaying this type of information, and the student may be counseled accordingly. (Best Practices 1, 2)

6. **A graduate student posts to his "wall" on Facebook that half of the class was sleeping during Dr. X's lecture on biostatistics.** This is very similar to the use case above. (Best Practices 1, 2)

7. **A pediatric resident posts (on her Facebook wall) a picture of a baby who was just discharged from her service, expressing joy, best wishes to the family, and congratulating everyone involved in this excellent patient outcome.** Without written patient/representative consent, this is a clear violation of patient confidentiality, even if the patient is not named. (Best Practice 3)

8. **A UTMB student wearing a UTMB t-shirt is tagged in a photo taken at a local bar and posted on a friend's Facebook® page. The medical student is clearly inebriated.** The two issues are that: (1) the UTMB logo identifies the affiliation to the institution; and (2) the unprofessional behavior of the student is available for all to see, including future employers and patients. Although, the medical student did not

post the photo, he/she should ask the friend to remove the photo and remove the tagging link to the student's own Facebook page. (Best Practices 2, 4)

9. **An applicant to a UTMB School is given access to a blog to comment on the experience. The applicant writes that another school in the area is obviously more prestigious and has better housing.** UTMB has no recourse against non-affiliated individuals. The administrator of the blog should have established policies and procedures for editorial procedures. If the blog posting meets these editorial guidelines, then the blog posting should remain.

10. **A UTMB student creates a social media website to discuss medical knowledge (e.g., "Geriatric Interest Group" on Facebook®)** This is a learning community environment, in which medical knowledge is exchanged, shared and discussed. While the goal is laudable, there are still risks. A disclaimer is necessary, since postings may be incorrect, taken out of context, or improperly referenced. The moderator should take precautions to prevent the posting of information or photographs that are potentially identifiable to a particular patient. (Best Practices 1, 3 ,6, 7)

Resources Used

UTMB used the following resources in preparing this guide:

- Mount Sinai Medical Center Social Media Guideline
- University of California Santa Barbara, We Care Safety Tips for On-line Social Networking
- University of Michigan Top 10 Guidelines for Success