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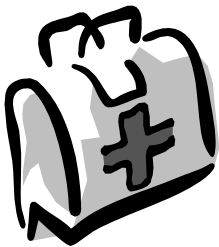
July 2010

## Doctors in Cyberspace: Do Social Media and Medicine Mix?

Do doctors belong in cyberspace? It's not hard to find doctors who blog, tweet, and post updates on LinkedIn and Facebook and other social networks. Some consider social media a natural extension of their educator role. Others are using it to reach new patients or share knowledge with colleagues around the globe. Yet there are reasons to be wary of social media and essential boundaries that must be maintained.

### Sharing Professional Expertise

Pascale H. Lane, M.D. is a pediatric nephrologist and professor of pediatrics at the



"Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something."

-Plato

University of Nebraska Medical Center. She uses Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and also authors a blog.

Lane started her blog after she began editing the ASN Kidney News at the American Society of Nephrology. "I jumped in to supplement what I was doing in print," says Lane. "It was more of an exercise to figure out how it might work."

Lane decided that she would have an online presence under her own name. "I use my own name and image for all of the social media I use," she says. "I also made a decision that I would not discuss anyone or anything at such a level that I wouldn't want it to be public knowledge."

"Most of the time I am blogging about a condition, such as volume overload or neonatal hypertension," Lane wrote in her June 15, 2010 blog entry *Ethical Doctor Blogging*. "While these posts may have been inspired by one or more in my care, the posts reviewed the conditions; no patient data of any sort were shared."

Lane finds time to write her

*How do you decide what to share about your personal life and your professional life? What boundaries are expected of a medical professional? Whether you are sharing stories about your life and work in cyberspace or in person with friends and colleagues, you know there are lines that shouldn't be crossed. When you are dealing with a situation you simply cannot share with friends or colleagues, remember that RAP is a confidential resource. We're here to help you deal with challenging issues throughout your residency, and to help you develop a personal skill set that will complement your medical knowledge. Our caring professionals are just a phone call away.*

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blog in between appointments, and tweets from her Blackberry while she's waiting for elevators, she says. "The only way you will figure it out is to actually start doing it. But you should always keep in mind that anything you post online is completely public, and it's forever. You can't make it go away, so before you say anything too snarky, think twice."

### Legal and Insurance Issues

"I was disappointed to find out that my standard malpractice insurance does not cover my liabilities for blogging,

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## Money Matters

### ***Tips for Preventing and Managing Wedding Debt***

The average wedding now costs \$22,000, representing more than five months worth of wages for a middle-income family, according to data from the Census Bureau.

Wedding and honeymoon costs add up fast and can create anxiety among the bride and groom-to-be. Credit Counselors, a nonprofit consumer education organization, offers tips for managing a budget and avoiding wedding debt.

#### ***Create a Wedding Budget*** –

Keep a spreadsheet or list of expenses that you can anticipate, including wedding attire, invitations, postage, rental fees, attendant gifts, flowers, and catering. Set limits on the amount you plan to spend.

***Track Your Spending*** – Create columns on your list to track the amount you actually spent and how you paid for each item (cash or credit). Use just one credit card for wedding purchases – perhaps the one with the lowest interest rate.

#### ***Be a Bargain Bride*** –

Comparison shop for wedding attire. Keep in mind that wedding gowns and bridesmaids' dresses can be rented, rather than purchased. Consignment shops and classified ads are also good sources for less costly gowns and accessories.

***Keep your guest list to a minimum*** – Each name you add to your list increases the cost of your reception.

***Reduce Reception Costs*** – Cut costs by having your wedding and reception at the same place. Consider a public historic home, a park or your own home.

Visit Credit Counselors, [www.RepayDebt.org](http://www.RepayDebt.org). for more money saving tips.

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## Social Media for Doctors *continued*

authoring books, social media, or even article writing,” says Dr. Tom Potisk. “I have had to take out additional coverage for these liabilities. I have not seen much benefit to my practice or even book sales from my social media activities. So, thus far it’s been an expensive, time-consuming, but fun hobby.”

While it seems obvious that doctors should not “friend” their patients on Facebook, there are plenty of gray areas that should be considered. Legal experts advise reviewing privacy laws, and hospital and university policies regarding the use of social media before launching a medical-related blog or joining online groups in which medical topics might be discussed with the general public.

### **Doctor-to-Doctor Social Media Growing**

New and beneficial uses for online networks emerge constantly. The ability to collaborate one another across specialties, time zones and state lines has attracted more than 114,000 physicians to Sermo ([www.sermo.com](http://www.sermo.com)), the world’s largest online community for physicians.

The Sermo community and business, founded by Daniel Palestrant, M.D., chief executive officer, is free to practicing physicians. It uses proprietary technology to verify physicians’ credentials in real time.

In April 2010, Sermo conducted a poll of its users to learn more about how they are using the network to improve patient outcomes. More than 400 physicians responded.

One example, reported in a Sermo news release, is the experience of a rural hospitalist who posted an unusual case involving a patient who was unable to stop moving for over three days with no relief. Afraid this condition would become fatal, the physician asked his colleagues on Sermo for help. One immediately suggested giving the patient amantadine. This assisted the physician in diagnosing and treating neuroleptic malignant syndrome, a rare and life threatening neurological disorder most often caused by an adverse reaction to neuroleptic or antipsychotic drugs. Within one hour of receiving the medication, the patient fell asleep, made a full recovery in the hospital and was discharged. The physician wrote of his experience, “In less time than it would take me to get a neurologist to come to the phone, I had 10 opinions on what to do.”

When patients and many of your colleagues are finding ways to communicate using social media, is that where you should be too? It’s worth exploring to learn the best ways to soar into cyberspace safely and successfully, so you and your patients can benefit.

### **Resources and Insights**

- Private Practice Social Media Policy: <http://sciencereport.com/2010/06/15/private-practice-social-media-policy/>
- Sermo—Online Physician Community <http://www.sermo.com/>
- *The New Community Rules: Marketing on the Social Web* by Tamar Weinberg <http://www.newcommunityrules.com/>
- *Modern Medicine* blog post by attorney Steven Kern, an expert in health care law, on physicians and social networking: <http://tinyurl.com/2d6oj66>