Social Media: The Blurring of Professional Boundaries

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Issue
• Healthcare professionals’ appropriate use of social media is of great concern to and from multiple perspectives

Issue
• Beyond the basic concerns of patient safety, confidentiality and privacy, there are significant fiduciary concerns in terms of human resource management, litigation and / or fines from various regulatory agencies for the provider and / or their employer

Review of Literature

College Students Post Things to Social Media They Know Are Inappropriate

- Miller, Parsons & Lifer, 2010
35% of Nursing Students Admitted to Improper Disclosure of PHI
- McCrink, 2010

Graduate Students “Googled” Their Patients and Did Not Think it Was Inappropriate
- Dilillo & Gale, 2011

Organizations (Schools / Employers) Do Not Have Social Media Policies

70% of Electronic Applications Deleted Due to Information Available on Social Media About Applicants
- Trossman, 2010

Root of the Issue
• Boundaries
  – Webster’s
  – Professional

The Same or Different?
• Privacy
• Confidentiality
Is Anything Confidential Anymore?

Regulatory
- HIPAA and HITECH
- Practice Act
- Professional Standards
  - Individual
  - Program

Federal
- HIPAA 1.0 (1996)
- HIPAA 2.0 (2003)
- HITECH (2009)

State
- Nurse Practice Act
- Therapist Practice Act
- Social Worker Practice Act

Professional Standards
- Public does not care if the person sitting next to us on the bus posts silly things, but for the person responsible for making life/death decisions the public expects competency in decision-making ability with online information

Principles of Social Networking
- Nurses must not transmit or place online individually identifiable patient information
- Nurses must observe ethically prescribed professional patient-nurse boundaries
Principles of Social Networking

• Nurses should understand that patients, colleagues, institutions, and employers may view postings
• Nurses should take advantage of privacy setting and seek to separate personal and professional information online

Principles of Social Networking

• Nurses should bring content that could harm a patient’s privacy, rights or welfare to the attention of appropriate authorities
• Nurses should participate in developing institutional policies governing online conduct

Consequences

• Personal
• Provider

Personal

• Employment
• Licensing Board
• Criminal

Provider

• Financial
• Regulatory
• Image

Future Considerations