SOCIAL NETWORKING BY EMERGENCY NURSES

Description

Social networking, when used appropriately, gives health care providers opportunities to share experiences and knowledge with one another. Other examples include its use as a means of debriefing after an emotionally difficult incident, and it also has shown its value when other means of communication are unavailable such as during a disaster event. Caution must be applied to ensure that confidentiality, privacy laws and institutional policies are not violated by sharing patient-specific identifiers, scenarios or photographs.

ENA Position

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association that:

1. Emergency nurses respect the individual’s right to privacy and confidentiality.¹

2. Emergency nurses are encouraged to take part in the development of organizational policies regarding social networking and the preservation of patient privacy and confidentiality.

3. Emergency nurses must know their legal and ethical responsibilities as well as their organization’s policies regarding their obligation to protect patient privacy, whether online or offline.²

4. Emergency nurses who share health-related information with patients via social networking must observe ethical and professional patient-nurse boundaries.²

5. Emergency nurses should evaluate their communications posted through social networking outlets with the understanding that a patient, colleague, educational institution, and current or future employer could potentially view their communications.²

6. Emergency nurses who become aware of questionable comments by a colleague on a social networking Web site should follow their institution’s policy regarding reporting breaches of confidentiality and dubious behavior.²

Background

Use of social networking Web sites by health care professionals has become a recognized means of networking with colleagues. While this mode of communication is widely accepted, it poses noteworthy risks to the users, requiring health care professionals to be cognizant of potential consequences. Posting patient-sensitive information or negative comments regarding a patient or employer and befriending patients online poses hazards for the user that can lead to serious and long-term consequences. Keeping personal and professional social networking accounts separated, using privacy settings, maintaining professional boundaries, and knowing the institution’s policy on social networking and confidentiality will reduce the risk to the individual.
References


Developed: 2011.

Approved by the ENA Board of Directors: February, 2012.