

A New E-Professionalism/Social Media Course: Student Reflections and Impact

Gisela Butera, MLIS; Alexandra Gomes, MSLS, MT; Katherine Chretien, MD; Terry Kind, MD, MPH
The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Background

This poster provides a review of interim results from a qualitative study on first year medical students' attitudes and perceptions of their definition of medical professionalism in social media.

Included in the study is an evaluation of changes in perspective since becoming a medical student and after participating in an E-Professionalism and Social Media instructional session.

Methods

- E-Professionalism and Social Media session held with first year medical students (January 2012)
- Session**
 - Students responded to audience response system questions reflecting on their social media usage and real-life examples of social media content (e.g. Facebook, blogs, Twitter) posted by health care professionals and students
 - Discussion about appropriate and inappropriate uses
 - Panel discussion with GW physicians who use social media
- Post-session reflection exercise**
 - Students responded to specific prompts requesting them to reflect on their personal social media experiences, their interpretation of online medical professionalism and create a draft of social media guidelines.
- Study**
 - 64 students consented to participate
 - Reflections were de-identified, and independently coded by two investigators to elicit themes.
 - All four investigators met to reconcile codes and ensure inter-rater reliability.



IN THE NEWS: "Cadaver photo comes back to haunt resident"

- First year medical student at Stony Brook Medical School posted on her facebook page a photo of a former classmate giving two thumbs up over a cadaver in an anatomy lab.
- Student was reprimanded and required to write letters of apology.
- After the case Stony Brook University Medical Center created guidelines on social networking

Results

Multiple themes have emerged, summarized here by question. Who are you representing online?

- Students reported a range of responses including representing themselves (either solely or in conjunction with other groups), their university or employer, the medical profession, their family, and their friends or peers.
- Some students felt that they represented different entities depending on which social media tool they used.

"I believe that whether someone is representing himself, his university, or his profession depends on the actual online medium being utilized."

"I am going to be an MD doctor in about three and a half years and do not want my patients to come across me online and look at me in any other way than they did when we were in the examining room."

"When I go online, I am aware that I am representing myself, my family, my friends, my future career in medicine, and any institutions that I am associated with."

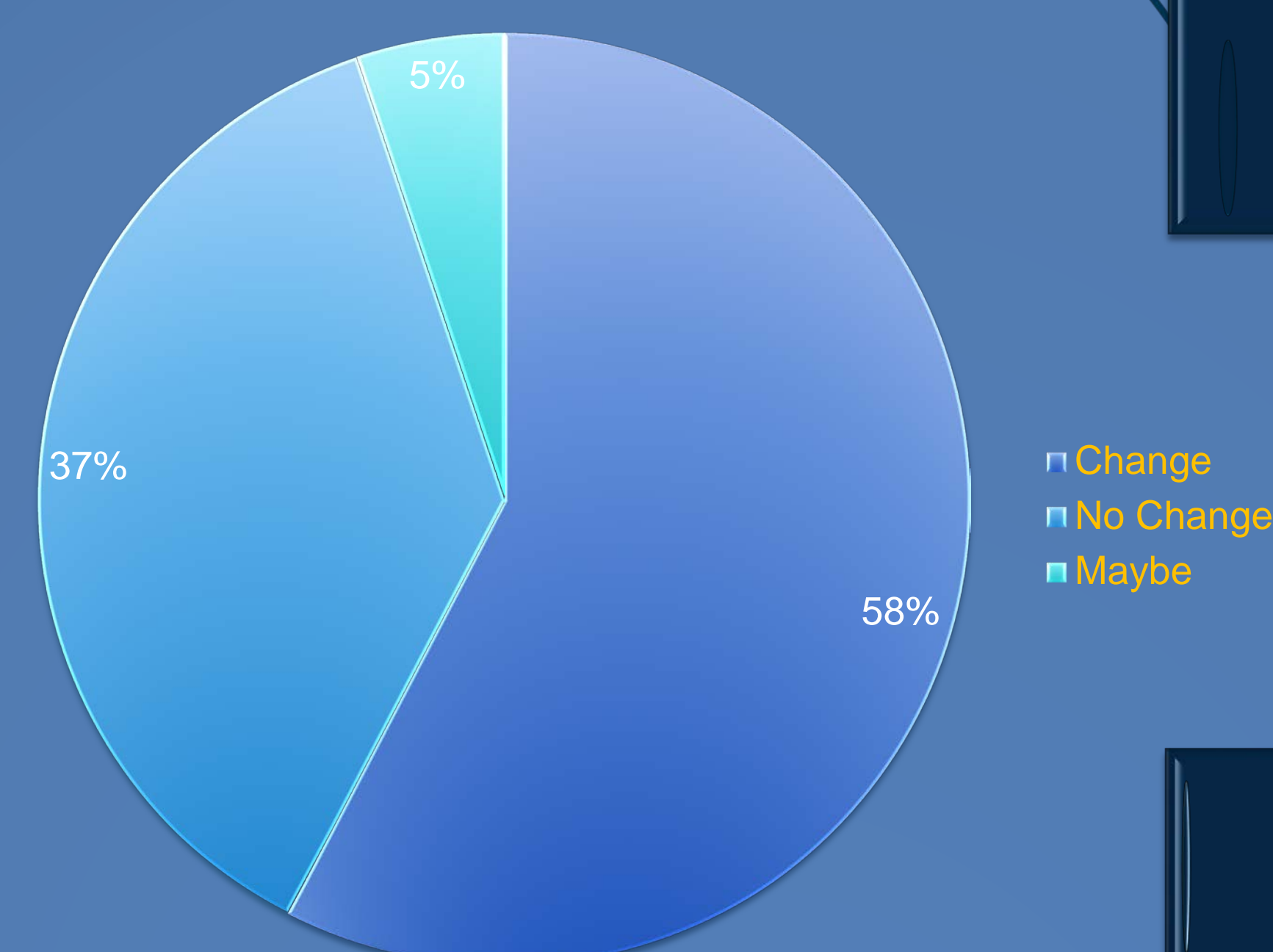
How do you define e-professionalism?

- Students defined e-professionalism in many different ways (complying with HIPAA; using common sense; following the values and standards of your institution). Some viewed e-professionalism as the same as professionalism in the real world.

What changes have you made to your social media presence since entering medical school?

- Since entering medical school, students have limited access, changed content and photos, increased awareness of possible repercussions, and changed frequency of use.
- Some students had already made changes to limit access to their social media presence before entering medical school (high school, college, during medical school application process).

After participating in this session, are you considering changing anything in your social media presence?



"Firstly, I had completely forgotten that I had a Myspace account that I opened during high school, which I quickly deleted. I then Googled myself to see what came up – I was surprised."

"I think my social media presence was fairly professional prior to the session; however, it definitely helped to reaffirm the fact that the way I represent myself online does matter and can influence how people view me as a medical professional."

"...because I really don't have a significant social media presence to begin with. However, I might decide to even take down my only social media account, which is Facebook."

If you were to draft a "social media guideline" for the incoming first-year class what would it look like?

- Many students felt that incorporating some language to raise awareness of possible social media impact was important.
- Some students suggested including specific examples, while others listed particular dos and don'ts.
- Limiting access to personal social media pages was mentioned, as well as removing unprofessional content.
- A few students advocated that no guidelines are necessary, and only one student explicitly said social media tools should not be utilized.

"...no recreational drug, alcoholic beverage, nudity, breaking the law images, no comments/images disrespecting any other individual or comments that you would not personally say or do... face to face"

"Google your name online and see what information comes up. Inspect all of the information and remove any information that you do not like or approve of as soon as possible."

"Be conscious of any future postings, photos, or entries as you start your medical school education. Anything that can be traced back to you or identified as being associated with you could help or harm or professional reputation!"

"I think a good general guideline is to stay true to ourselves but remember that when we first put on those white coats back in August, we came to represent part of a larger network of professionals. Ultimately, we must respect our patients, our colleagues, and ourselves."

"I thoroughly believe that the first amendment fully protects the students' right to project any aspect of themselves"

"Complaining on Facebook about an upcoming exam I think is fine (although not terribly productive), blogging about how horrible a patient was is unacceptable."

Conclusions

Medical students are consumers and producers of social media. Including online professionalism in the curriculum in this way with a focus on implication and best practices can help them develop an awareness of their professional presence in this electronic era.

Student suggestions for social media guidelines can serve as possible building blocks for the development of an institution's social media policy, if desired.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the medical student class of 2015 for their enthusiastic participation in the session and study.