

Guidelines for Defining Social Media Policies

It is beneficial to have a well-crafted plan in place before you begin posting on social media. Defining policies and communicating them to your staff will help provide guidance in how to make decisions, give instructions of your expectations and set the tone for how your practice will be represented online. Even if you are already active on social media, it is never too late to consider your company policies.

Here are a few things to consider when writing your social media policy:

- **Who will post:**
 - Identify those in your practice who should post to your social media accounts
 - Remind all staff members to not engage in comments or discussions about the practice publicly without authorization
 - Verify that your page administrators are acting as themselves online, unless they are providing a comment to a patient, then make sure they are doing so as the page
 - Encourage good communication between the team so everyone knows their role
- **What to post:**
 - Identify how frequently your practice should post
 - Remind page administrators about the type of content they should be sharing
 - Verify that the content being shared is meaningful and respectful—in other words, no spam and no remarks that could be offensive or taken out of context
 - Encourage your team to speak about procedures and programs in consistent ways
- **When to be cautious:**
 - Identify ways to respect patient privacy and be careful not to share anything without prior release, or that otherwise constitutes disclosure of Personal Health Information
 - Remind administrators to alert management if they see information posted by others, including patients themselves, that is confidential
 - Verify that everyone is following HIPAA guidelines, as well as your confidentiality policy
 - Encourage employees to handle situations online carefully and have a policy in place for social media mistakes – see tips in our Resource module, Guidelines for Handling Social Media Missteps
- **How to reply:**
 - Identify how you will respond in certain situations before they arise and consider if what you are adding is something you would say to a public audience, or if it would be better handled privately
 - Remind employees to respond when necessary in a timely manner
 - Verify that the team remain polite and courteous even if correcting someone or disagreeing with them
 - Encourage the administrator to move conversations offline to discuss private matters

Before you begin sharing via social media, take time to identify, remind, verify and encourage your team about how to interact with and post on behalf of your company. Communicating expectations and empowering your staff to make decisions will help control the way you are represented and perceived by patients and prospects alike.