**Maintaining Professional Boundaries on Social Media**

When your patients want to get to know you, allowing them to have some insight into your personal life is not a bad thing, as it helps you develop a connection with your patients. The best place to do this is on your website—rather than connecting on social media—where you can highlight your education, hobbies, family, etc., and control the information being published.

by [Mike Whitmer](https://www.ncmic.com/authors/mike-whitmer-a1/) in [Social & Electronic Media](https://www.ncmic.com/learning-center/articles/risk-management/social-electronic-media/) on Wednesday, June 26, 2019

**For healthcare providers, maintaining professional boundaries is important. In healthcare, there is an invisible hierarchy. Your patients should view you as a professional first, not as a friend. Blurring those lines by connecting with your patients on social media can lead to misconceptions, awkward situations and inconveniences for both you and the patient.**

In addition, the patient may tend to see you as less than professional if they see details of your personal life. When it comes to “friending” patients on social media, you should ask yourself: What would the possible benefits be? What are the potential issues?

The safest route: Set and be clear with your patients about your boundaries. When the question arises regarding connecting with patients on social media, have a prepared answer ready. Be clear and transparent. Something to the effect of: “(Patient’s name), I received your ‘friend’ request on Facebook the other day. In your best interest as well as mine, it’s a practice policy to not connect with patients on my personal social media sites. We strive to maintain patient confidentiality and privacy, and we fear that social media blurs those very important issues. We do have a business site that you are more that welcome to ‘like’ and ‘follow.’”

By having a canned response ready, you will have more credibility with your patients, rather than getting caught off guard and stammering through an excuse.

In addition to setting boundaries with your patients, you may also want to consider setting clear, professional boundaries and being upfront [**with your staff.**](https://www.ncmic.com/learning-center/articles/risk-management/social-electronic-media/social-media-policy-considerations-for-dcs/)

* As a practice owner, be sure that your staff knows your boundary expectations when it comes to their involvement with you and, more importantly, with the patients.
* Staff may not think about the complications you face with them being your patient’s “friend” on social media, so talking to them openly can illustrate your point.

You can solve many issues surrounding social media use in your practice by having a [**social media policy**](https://www.ncmic.com/learning-center/articles/risk-management/social-electronic-media/what-are-the-risks-of-expanding-my-social-media-presence/) in place.