

Physicians should consider social media as public space

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Noting that a common theme among recommendations for physician use of social media suggests separating professional and personal identities, Matthew DeCamp, M.D., Ph.D., from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and colleagues discuss the feasibility of this approach and suggest an alternative approach.

According to the authors, it is operationally impossible to separate

professional and personal content; furthermore, professional identity constitutes and is constituted by [personal identity](#). Many active physician users of social media value the intentional blurring of boundaries. Separation of professional and personal identities online may be harmful, with harms including the psychological or physical burden of trying to maintain two identities. In addition, depersonalized online interaction may be less effective and may reduce trust. Whilst complete separation of identities is problematic, the authors suggest recognizing that social media exists in a [public space](#). Considering whether something is appropriate for a physician to post on a public space will help define the boundaries of social media use. This approach fits with the existing general professionalism curricula at medical schools, which encourage students to be aware of their professional identity in public and private spaces.

"Resolving the supposed online identity crisis therefore requires explicitly incorporating social media into [medical education](#) and professionalism curricula," the authors write. "Absent this approach, the professional transgressions motivating guidelines will persist and the potential benefits of social media will remain unrealized."

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