

# Ethical implications for looking up applicants on facebook

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(HealthDay)—Looking up students on Facebook and social networking sites (SNS) is associated with serious ethical concerns, according to a perspective piece published in the March issue of the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*.

Deva M. Wells, from the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, discusses the issues relating to use of SNS in evaluating applicants to medical schools and residency programs.

Noting that almost every state medical board has handled at least one case of online unprofessionalism, Wells suggests that uncovering

worrisome online behavior may seem useful and justified. However, it is unclear whether the public availability of details of an applicant's personal life and behavior justify actively pursuing them. Facebook and other SNS can make momentary indiscretions of the past indelible, although students may have matured since these incidents. Much of the information that can be directly ascertained or inferred from Facebook would be illegal to obtain during in-person interviews. Less sensitive information could also lead to an unfair appraisal. Misinterpretation of SNS content and implicit bias could further undermine a fair evaluation for applicants.

"Applicants would be wise to consider the potential impact of their online behavior on their professional development as physicians-in-training and on the profession as a whole," Wells writes. "At the same time, medical educators should be mindful of how they use SNS to evaluate applicants' qualifications."

**More information:** [Full Text](#)

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