



Social Media Guidelines for PAs and PA Students

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Social media is an incredibly powerful tool for PAs and PA students to communicate with one another, build their professional brand, and discuss and advance the PA profession. Thanks to these widely used platforms, PAs and PA students have a fast and easy avenue to quickly disseminate information and be a trusted voice to millions of people simultaneously. Because of its widespread reach, it is imperative for PAs and PA students to represent themselves in a professional and ethical manner that is respectful of the PA profession and fellow PAs and PA students. It is also important to understand Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) laws, which apply to social media and could have negative consequences if not properly followed.

Social media networks include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, SnapChat, Clubhouse, YouTube, Pinterest, Reddit, Huddle; as well as personal blogs, podcasts, and other public discussion platforms. These platforms offer the opportunity to communicate, collaborate, build professional relationships, and to share information and experiences.

When posting or communicating via social media channels, PAs and PA students have the responsibility to:

Be smart. PA social media activity reflects the profession. When posting content and engaging in discussions on social media, be professional and do not represent the PA profession in a false or misleading way.

Be respectful. Post and engage on social media responsibly. Do not use vulgar language or post disrespectful photos. Be honest about credentials. Ensure posts and comments do not disrespect other individuals based on one's race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Be tolerant. A diversity of perspectives and viewpoints enrich and educate conversations.

Be transparent. Ensure that your personal online presence remains separate from an employer's or PA program's. Be sure to understand your organization's social media policies.

Think responsibly. Everything that is posted on social media can continue to exist in cyberspace. Even private personal accounts and deleted comments can be accessed by those who are not friends or followers.

Separate personal from private. PAs and PA students should consider setting personal pages to "private" or setting up separate accounts for personal and professional use. It is not recommended to "friend" patients or interact with patients or former patients via social media. Do not give medical advice via social media.

Protect patient privacy. HIPAA does not specifically state social media guidelines, as it was enacted years before social networks were launched. However, HIPAA laws do apply to social media. Do not discuss confidential information and respect patient privacy. Examples of potential violations include: posting a photo when there is a patient chart on a nearby desk or a patient in the background; posting about a patient (with or without the individual's name); or posting any of this information within a private group. PAs could be at risk of a violation if the patient recognizes himself/herself in the post. To avoid violations, read and adhere to [HIPAA guidelines](#) as they relate to social media.

Share trustworthy information. PAs and PA students are trusted resources for followers. Ensure the information shared on social media is factual and comes from a trusted source.

Abide by copyright laws. Obtain permission before sharing any content you do not have the rights for, and include proper credits and citations when necessary.

Human error. We are all human and mistakes happen. Make sure to research, read, and edit the content before posting. Misspelled words and names, false claims, facts, and statistics reflect poorly on your personal brand and the PA profession as a whole.

Bottom line. As PAs and PA students, you are encouraged to use social media to share information, exercise creativity, and have your voice heard. However, this should be executed with a careful and thoughtful approach. Social media is not exempt from legal ramifications, and posts or comments can result in legal or disciplinary proceedings.

For additional information and guidelines on professionalism on social media designed just for medical professionals, please see the following resources:

American Medical Association's [Professionalism in the Use of Social Media](#)

American Student Medical Association's [Social Media Guidelines for Medical Students and Physicians](#)

HIPAA Journal's [HIPAA Social Media Rules](#)

[Leveraging Media and Social Media to Achieve Your Organization's Goals](#): This presentation from LAS 2022 covers how PA advocates and COs can elevate the PA profession by leveraging media and social media.

Have questions about this, or want to discuss AAPA's social media pages? Please contact:

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