

# Interacting with colleagues on social media: Tips for avoiding trouble

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**A**s clinicians, we increasingly communicate with each other via social media platforms to network, collaborate on research, find professional and personal support, refer patients, or hold academic conversations.<sup>1,2</sup> Although it is convenient, this form of online communication directly and indirectly breaks down barriers between our professional and personal lives, which can make it challenging to avoid behavior that could negatively affect one's professional image.<sup>2</sup>

Although some medical organizations have offered guidelines on health care professionals' use of social media,<sup>2,3</sup> these are subjective and not evidence-based. Here I offer some suggestions for appropriately interacting with your colleagues (ie, individuals who are not your personal friends) on social media.

**Think before you post.** Consider the potential professional ramifications of what you are about to post, and don't post anything that may have adverse consequences on your image or that of psychiatry as a whole.

**Don't post derogatory or defamatory statements about colleagues.** Such actions may violate professional codes of conduct. Disagreeing with colleagues on social media is common, but your posts should be respectful, friendly, and reflect positively on the profession.<sup>2</sup> Avoid making negative statements—even in jest—about your colleagues' skills or professional experience, because such communication is not appropriate for public dissemination.<sup>2</sup>

If you notice colleagues posting unprofessional content that could negatively affect their careers or the public's trust in psychia-

try, tactfully express your concerns to them, and suggest that they take appropriate measures to rectify the situation.<sup>2</sup> Be aware of your state's laws and regulations about mandated reporting if you discover a colleague's online content violates the scope of clinical practice or ethical standards.<sup>1</sup> If the content is in violation of the law or medical board regulations, you may have a legal obligation to report that colleague to law enforcement, the licensing board, and/or his/her employer.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Avoid online snooping into the personal lives of colleagues.** Respect their privacy when viewing their posts about personal activities that are not germane to their professional services.<sup>1</sup> If you find videos, images, or messages that reveal private, confidential, or sensitive information about a colleague, do not distribute that information without the colleague's consent.<sup>1</sup>

**Be careful when accepting friend requests.** Conflicts could arise if you accept friend requests from some but not all of your colleagues; this could be interpreted as favoritism and potentially create problematic work relationships.<sup>2</sup> Be consistent in accepting or rejecting colleagues' friend requests. Consider using an employment-oriented social media platform to connect with colleagues outside of the workplace.<sup>2</sup>

## References

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## Disclosure

The author reports no financial relationships with any companies whose products are mentioned in this article, or with manufacturers of competing products.



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