

ICEA Position Paper

Social Media and HIPAA

Position

The International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) believes that social media is an important communication tool. When used wisely, social media expands communication and connectivity. When used improperly or unwisely, it can lead to confidentiality infringements and possibly Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) violations. Birth professionals should review the proper use of social media while maintaining HIPAA compliance and making wise and ethical decisions on information to post.

Background

The use of social media by expectant parents as well as health care professionals is well-established.

Social networks are described as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their lists of connections and

those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

According to Dr. Julia Kish-Doto, while women of childbearing age frequently use social media for learning, professionals underutilize this approach as a means to reach, educate and inform the decision making of women. Kish-Doto surmises that a social media campaign may ultimately increase knowledge and awareness about low-medical intervention births for future generations (Kish-Doto, 2010). Romano et al believe that social networks are effective at empowering women (Romano, et al., 2010).

Implications for Practice

While social media has become vital to growing businesses, it is important to realize that once a photo or comment is posted online, it may never go away. Websites such as web.archive.org is a digital time capsule and can retrieve data from decades past. The information that is posted online can be reproduced and distributed by copy/paste, forward, email, and instant messaging. Many social media sites have in their Terms and Conditions stipulations that you do not own the information posted on your personal social networking website (such as Facebook). Most social networking sites contain Terms and Conditions which provide them the right to use all of your information forever.

All maternal child health professionals should be aware of the interplay between social media and HIPAA violations.

continued on next page

1

ICEA's 5 Tips to Avoid HIPAA Problems with Social Media

1. Remember the standards of birth professionalism are the same online as in any other circumstances.
2. Do not share or post information or photos gained through the birth professional-client relationship.
3. Maintain professional boundaries in the use of social media. Online contact with clients may blur this boundary.
4. Do not make negative remarks about clients, employers or colleagues, or birth facilities even if they are not clearly identified.

5. Do not take photos or videos of clients on personal devices including cell phones.

Adapted from the American Nursing Association's Tips to Avoid Problems with Social Media.

References

- Boyd, S. and Ellison, N. (2007). Social networking sites: definition, history and scholarship. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Kish-Doto, J. (2010). RUprego? The Role of Social media to educate young women about low intervention childbirth. *Cases In Public Health Communication & Marketing, Vol. IV.*
- Romano, A. et al. (2010). Social media, power and the future of VBAC. *Journal of Perinatal Education*, 19(3), 43-52.

International Childbirth Education Association

2

2501 Aerial Center Pkwy Ste. 103, Morrisville, NC 27560 • Phone 919-863-9487 • Fax 919-459-2075 • www.icea.org