Confidentiality in E-Professionalism: The Case of Electronic Health Records (EHRs)

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Dear Editor

Today a large number of health care practitioners are users of a variety of social media and online platforms. The term E-professionalism or electronic professionalism is the manner in which one involves himself online in connection with his profession and it incorporates an individual's attachment to professional codes of conduct. In other words, if one acts and behaves in a professional way on electronic or digital platforms, he has observed e-professionalism. One issue which is of paramount importance is that confidentiality must be properly deemed in e-professionalism in all fields in general and in medical practice in particular. If confidentiality is not regarded in patients' Electronic Health Record (EHR), patients will not reveal correct information to their physicians and the professional image of health care providers will be damaged.

An Electronic Health Record of a patient entails information about a patient's health history, including diagnoses, medicines, and treatment plans. EHRs are tools that pave the way for high-value patient centered care and strong patient–physician relationships.[1]

They also influence patient care, interactions between a patient and his physician and clinical training.

Patient encounters and information must be kept confidential and private, promoting trust and enhancing the quality of communication or else patients may not reveal important information or might not seek care, fearing loss of their jobs.[1] Worries are deeply felt with EHRs because information is so promptly transmitted and system breaches are rather prevalent.

The potential risks of social media use in medical practice have been extensively described and the most prominent of all are concerns about compromising patient confidentiality, or removing public confidence in the medical profession.[2] Though sometimes physicians and nurses do not realize that what they are posting is unprofessional or in violation of privacy and confidentiality regulations, they are still accountable and liable for their actions.[3]

Sometimes professional and personal identities get entangled. Several studies have reported that it is challenging to distinguish professional and personal identities on social media due to the fact that they often

overlap. Moreover, improper application of social media can dismally impact the fundamental principle of a trusting nurse-patient relationship. If patients fear that their private information could be shared, this may have serious social implications[4,5] since patients may lose confidence in the health care system[3] and they will not show any inclination to share private medical information. Likewise, privacy breaches and confidentiality violations may impair the professional image[3] and in this regard many health care professionals may bear the consequences.

Therefore, electronic health records provide a multitude of advantages; however, confidentiality in electronic medical records and health information must be deeply observed by health professionals and must not be divulged unless the patient has given full consent for such release. Physicians must be aware of the full standards of patient privacy and confidentiality which must be heeded in online settings. Otherwise, patients will refrain from disclosing their information or seeking medical advice and physicians and health care providers will be both accountable and liable for violating confidentiality.

Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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