

Breaching Patient Confidentiality on Social Networking Sites

Over half of 78 US medical schools studied had reported cases of students posting unprofessional content online. One in 10 of these contained frank violations of patient confidentiality. Most of the incidents were punished by informal warnings but some cases did result in dismissal from medical school.

The study, led by Dr Katherine Chretien of the Washington DC VA Medical Center highlights that there are very few guidelines and regulations regarding social networking and that many trainee doctors are unaware of the dangers. Patient confidentiality is often breached unintentionally. She recommends specific training for medical students regarding the Internet and social networking sites; how to adapt privacy settings, conducting web searches of their names etc.

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