Social Media Best Practices

The University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) encourages and promotes community involvement in all online communications. The practices provided below will allow for meaningful conversation and ongoing community participation to help enrich and impact more lives. Please note that as UCSF personnel, you must still abide by UCSF policies and guidelines, including Blogging and Social Media Guidelines, Campus Administrative Policies, the Campus Code of Conduct, Local and Campus Policies, and UCSF Identity Guidelines.

Think it through and form a strategy. Identify the purpose, whom you want to reach (audience), the types of content you intend to share and the overarching goals.

Respect confidentiality. Refrain from speculation on the future of UCSF and its practices. Keep topics focused on matters of public record when speaking about UCSF. Do not disclose confidential or private, non-public information.

The Internet is a public space. In most cases, everything you post online will be seen by a public audience. Consider those viewing your content, leadership, patients, prospective patients, privacy and the media. Assume everyone is reading your post, no matter how obscure or secure the site to which you are posting may seem.

Be respectful. Refrain from posting material that is profane, libelous, obscene, threatening, abusive, harassing, hateful, defamatory or embarrassing to another person or entity.

Be honest about who you are. If the conversation relates to UCSF, you should identify yourself as working for UCSF. Social media are all about transparency. Don’t hide your identity or affiliations. Conversations and commenting must be in line with HIPAA policy.

You speak for yourself, but your actions reflect those of UCSF. Unless you have been authorized by University Relations, you should not speak on behalf of UCSF. Do not portray yourself as a spokesperson, or even an unofficial spokesperson, on issues relating to UCSF.

Listen. Before engaging in online platforms, become an observer. Listen to the conversations, listen to existing UCSF University Relations conversations, view the content and see what people are talking about.

Live by the law. Do not post content that violates any state or federal laws. Obtain permission to use or reproduce copyrighted content.

Add value to the discussion. Social media at their best are an exchange of helpful or interesting information through a two-way conversation.
Adhere to UCSF compliance requirements and policies. These include, but are not limited to, HIPAA and employee conduct.

Avoid arguments. Avoid posting materials or comments that may be seen as offensive, demeaning, inappropriate, threatening or abusive. Respectfully withdraw from discussions that go off topic or become profane.

Be helpful – an official response may be needed. If you spot a potential issue and believe an official UCSF response is needed, contact University Relations.

Additional Best Practices for Physicians

Act as if you were at work. Physicians must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-physician relationship in accordance with professional ethical guidelines, just as they would in any other context.

Perception is reality. Physicians must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers (particularly for physicians in training and medical students), and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

When in doubt, ask University Relations.