

# Loyola Stritch professors analyze ethical issues with social media and healthcare

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Social media has become engrained into almost every area of our life, but should you really be Facebook friends with your doctor?

In a recent *AMA Journal of Ethics* article titled "Why Can't We Be Friends? A Case-Based Analysis of Ethical Issues with Social Media in Health Care," two Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine professors analyze this issue. Kayhan Parsi, JD, PhD, and Nanette Elster, JD, MPH, who are part of Loyola's Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics, discuss the good, the bad, and the ugly of [social media](#) and health care.

"Maintaining privacy and confidentiality are integral to the patient-health care professional relationship, since preserving patient trust is essential for competent clinical care," Parsi and Elster write in the article. "The use of social media in health care raises a number of issues about professional and personal boundaries, and the integrity, accountability, and trustworthiness of health care professionals."

The article uses five case studies to highlight possible ethical and legal issues that arise with the use of social media in health care. The cases address topics such as posting work-related photos on Facebook, tweeting personal or political opinions, and Googling patients and prospective candidates for jobs. The article analyzes questions like: is it appropriate for health care professionals to friend a patient on Facebook, or even connect through LinkedIn?

"When it comes to social media it's important for [health care professionals](#) to be aware of personal and professional boundaries. When someone reads a post, do they see it is as a statement from a physician, or an individual? These lines are easily blurred on social media," said Parsi.

Despite the potential pitfalls of social media, Parsi and Elster also highlight benefits of social media in health care. Examples include more rapid response to [public health emergencies](#) and better communication about pharmaceutical and other recalls.

"We also see that social media makes [health care](#) institutions more personal and more human. Patients feel they can engage with the hospital or their doctor's office and they want to tell their stories," said Elster.

The [article](#) provides recommendations for health organizations in creating guidelines and finding ways to use these social media to promote good outcomes.

**More information:** Why Can't We Be Friends? A Case-Based Analysis of Ethical Issues with Social Media in Health Care, [journalofethics.ama-assn.org/2015/11/peer1-1511.html](http://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/2015/11/peer1-1511.html)

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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