Social networking profiles and professionalism issues in residency applicants: an original study-cohort study.

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Social networking profiles and professionalism issues in residency applicants: an original study-cohort study.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To determine the frequency of social networking, the degree of information publicly disclosed, and whether unprofessional content was identified in applicants from the 2010 Residency Match.

BACKGROUND: Medical professionalism is an essential competency for physicians to learn, and information found on social networking sites may be hazardous to the doctor-patient relationship and an institution's public perception. No study has analyzed the social network content of applicants applying for residency.

METHODS: Online review of social networking Facebook profiles of graduating medical students applying for a residency in orthopedic surgery. Evidence of unprofessional content was based upon Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education guidelines. Additional recorded applicant data included as follows: age, United States Medical Licensing Examination part I score, and residency composite score. Relationship between professionalism score and recorded data points was evaluated using an analysis of variance.

RESULTS: Nearly half of all applicants, 46% (200/431), had a Facebook profile. The majority of profiles (85%) did not restrict online access to their profile. Unprofessional content was identified in 16% of resident applicant profiles. Variables associated with lower professionalism scores included unmarried relationship status and lower residency composite scores.
CONCLUSION: It is critical for healthcare professionals to recognize both the benefits and risks present with electronic communication and to vigorously protect the content of material allowed to be publically accessed through the Internet.