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Published
2013

Conference Title
Association for the Study of Medical Education Annual Scientific Meeting 2013: Changes in Healthcare and the Effects on Medical Education

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Health Professionals in Cyberspace: Enhancing the Learning of Professionalism in the Context of Web 2.0

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Background and Purpose
There is increasing recognition of the risks posed by Web 2.0 technologies for students engaged in professional courses. JMacD’s study investigating the use of Facebook by young doctors demonstrated the potential for young doctors to “post” material that is unprofessional. Similar concerns have been expressed in the nursing profession. While improved education regarding such dangers has been advocated, a comprehensive literature search has not revealed any such educational interventions targeting undergraduate health professional students. Given the reported lack of congruence between students’ reported concerns about privacy and their online behaviour, it is important to explore with students how to effect change in their behaviour. The aim of this project is to work with students to develop and test such an educational intervention.

Methods
This project is being conducted in four stages, the first two of which will form the basis for this paper:

1. Needs Analysis consisting of separate focus groups of nursing and medical students, gathered by purposive. The aim was to explore perspectives on professionalism and to compare the perspectives of future nurses and future doctors. A specific focus was the development of their image of self as a professional engaging in social networking vs a lay perception of self.

2. Analysis comprises coding and thematic analysis using HyperResearch software to identify core themes relating to professionalism and professional identity as it pertains to the use of Web 2.0, and to generate ideas for an educational intervention.

3. Development of intervention and evaluation tools.

4. Pilot study of intervention

Results
Results of the analysis of the initial focus groups will be presented, along with our initial conceptualisation of the proposed educational intervention.

Discussion and Conclusions
The tension between traditional concepts of professionalism and societal changes is exacerbated by Web 2.0 technologies that challenge concepts of privacy and boundaries. This paper will present the views of future health professionals at a formative stage of their developing self-concept as professionals and lead to discussion of optimal approaches to helping tomorrow’s professionals to balance the demands of their professional lives with their expectations of an online social life.

References