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Contact: Drew Carlson, (817) 868-4043

dcarlson@fsmb.org; www.fsmb.org

New FSMB Policy Addresses Appropriate Use of Social Media by Physicians

Guidelines adopted by Federation of State Medical Boards address growing use of social media and networking sites by physicians in medical practice

DALLAS – The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) House of Delegates adopted new policy guidelines on the appropriate use of social media and social networking sites by physicians during the FSMB’s 2012 Annual Meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, on April 28.

Developed by the FSMB’s Special Committee on Ethics and Professionalism, the [Model Policy Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Social Media and Social Networking in Medical Practice](#) provide recommendations for state medical boards to consider in educating their licensees on the proper use of social media and social networking websites.

“Digital media has enormous potential for doctors and patients, allowing us more opportunities to share information and establish meaningful professional relationships,” said FSMB President and CEO Humayun Chaudhry, DO. “However, physicians also need to be aware of how to maintain the same professional and ethical standards in their online activity as they do in the rest of their practice. Failing to do so can hurt patients and physicians’ careers.”

Violations of online professionalism are prevalent among physicians, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study, conducted by the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars* at Yale in collaboration with the FSMB, found that 92 percent of state medical boards in the United States have received reports of violations of online professionalism.

Developed by the FSMB to encourage physicians who use social media to protect themselves from unintended consequences, the new model guidelines include these recommendations:

- Physicians should only have online interaction with patients when discussing the patient's medical treatment within the physician-patient relationship – and these interactions should never occur on personal social networking or social media websites.
- Patient privacy and confidentiality must be protected at all times, especially on social media and social networking websites. Although physicians may discuss their experiences in non-clinical settings, they should never provide any information that could be used to identify patients.
- Physicians should be aware that any information they post on a social networking site may be disseminated to a larger audience, and that what they say may be taken out of context or remain publicly available online in perpetuity.

The *Model Policy Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Social Media and Social Networking in Medical Practice* is available on the FSMB website at www.fsmb.org.

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About the FSMB

The FSMB is a national non-profit organization representing all medical boards within the United States and its territories that license and discipline allopathic and osteopathic physicians and, in some jurisdictions, other health care professionals. It assists these state and territorial medical boards as they go about their mandate of protecting the public's health, safety and welfare. The FSMB leads by promoting excellence in medical practice, licensure, and regulation.