

Social Media Guidance for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons

A Practical Overview for AAOMS Members

Social media has become a common way for the public, patients and healthcare providers to communicate, share information and build relationships. Platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn and others allow oral and maxillofacial surgeons to educate the public, highlight their practices and connect with their communities.

For those who choose to use it, social media can provide the following benefits for oral and maxillofacial surgery practices:

- **Patient education** – Social media provides an opportunity to share reliable information about oral and maxillofacial health, procedures and prevention of oral and maxillofacial conditions.
- **Community engagement** – Practices can highlight their involvement in community activities, outreach programs and professional initiatives.
- **Practice visibility** – An active online presence can help patients learn about the practice, staff and services.
- **Partnership building** – Social media is a way for practices to connect with and inform patients, the general public and referring providers in ways that support trust and familiarity. These activities can help prospective patients better understand the role of oral and maxillofacial surgeons and the care they provide.

This document provides general guidance for AAOMS members when engaging in social media activities in a professional capacity or in a manner that identifies or implies affiliation with the oral and maxillofacial surgery specialty. It is not intended to prescribe specific rules or strategies but to outline principles that support professionalism, ethical conduct and patient trust.

Professional Responsibilities Online

Participation in social media does not change a surgeon's professional obligations. The same ethical standards that apply to in-person interactions also apply to online communications.

In particular, oral and maxillofacial surgeons must:

- 1. Protect patient privacy.**
- 2. Communicate in a professional manner.**
- 3. Follow applicable laws and regulations.**

The following sections provide additional details on each of these responsibilities.

1. Protect patient privacy

Patient confidentiality applies to all forms of communication – including social media. Even well-intended posts can unintentionally reveal protected health information.

Under federal privacy law and the ethical standards of the profession, including the AAOMS Code of Professional Conduct, oral and maxillofacial surgeons must safeguard patient information and respect the patient's right to confidentiality.

Protecting patient privacy is both a legal requirement and a fundamental professional responsibility. When in doubt, avoid sharing information that could identify a patient or their treatment. Remove or decline posts that reveal protected health information.

When using social media, keep in mind:

- **Never share identifiable patient information** without written patient authorization.
- **Avoid discussing specific patient cases online**, even if names are omitted. Details such as dates, procedures or circumstances may still make a patient identifiable.
- **Use caution with photos or videos.** Images of patients, treatment areas or medical records may reveal protected information.
- **Do not confirm or acknowledge that someone is a patient** when responding to reviews or comments online. Do not reference anything about their care, visit or any detail from their post. Thank them generically and redirect to a telephone number where a patient representative can handle issues or concerns, as appropriate.

2. Communicate in a professional manner

Members should communicate in a professional and respectful manner. Online communications reflect not only on an individual surgeon but also on the specialty as a whole.

Successful social media communication often reflects the tone and values of the practice.

Consider the following general principles:

- **Be authentic and approachable.** Patients often respond well to communications that feel genuine and human.
- **Keep messages clear and concise.** Short, straightforward posts are typically easier for audiences to engage with the content.
- **Be mindful of public visibility.** Posts may be viewed widely and shared beyond their intended audience.
- **Be truthful and accurate.** Social media posts that describe services, training or outcomes should be supported by evidence where appropriate. Posts should not be misleading or exaggerated or imply superiority over other providers.
- **Maintain a professional tone.** Even informal communications should reflect the professionalism of the specialty.
- **Avoid criticism of colleagues or other health professionals.** Maintain respectful, professional language when referencing colleagues, their treatment decisions or their qualifications. Uphold the profession's credibility by keeping peer interactions on social media collegial and constructive.

3. Follow applicable laws and regulations

State dental boards, advertising regulations and institutional policies apply to online communications. Members also should be aware that if a practice receives compensation, free

products or other benefits in exchange for social media posts or endorsements, federal and some state guidelines require disclosure of that relationship.

Getting Started

Practices that are new to social media may find it helpful to begin with the following approach:

- **Designate responsibility** – Identify who in the practice will manage the account, review interactions, moderate comments and respond to messages or comments quickly. Responses should never disclose or confirm protected health information, even acknowledge someone as a patient.
- **Keep all staff informed** – Ensure staff understand privacy expectations as social media posts from employees may also affect patient confidentiality. Also, obtain written consent from staff members before featuring them in practice posts or photos.
- **Develop basic internal guidelines** – Practices may benefit from establishing simple policies regarding posting, monitoring and responding to comments. Practices should adopt a written social media policy for employees included in the employee handbook that each employee signs that addresses expectations for both practice accounts and personal accounts when referencing the practice or patients. Be sure to regularly check accounts for comments and questions.
- **Post a standing disclaimer** on social media profiles such as “Please do not share personal health information on this page. For questions about your care, please contact us directly at [office manager phone number].”
- **Consider using templated generic responses** for any post where someone identifies as a patient whether positive, negative or neutral.
- **Manage account access and credentials** – Use strong, unique passwords for practice social media accounts and limit access to authorized staff. Update credentials promptly when a staff member with account access leaves the practice.
- **Review practice’s online presence** – In addition to social media, practices should claim business profiles on major platforms and ensure contact information and practice details are accurate on review sites and directories.

Questions? Contact communications@aaoms.org