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CONFIDENTIALITY: Electronic Devices and Social Media in the Workplace

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Address social media and cell phone dependence
2. Identify electronic use problems in the healthcare setting
3. Explain the ramifications of social media and cell phone use in Central Service

Instrument Continuing Education (ICE) lessons provide members with ongoing education in the complex and ever-changing area of surgical instrument care and handling. These lessons are designed for CIS technicians, but can be of value to any CRCST technician who works with surgical instrumentation.

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MORE THAN EVER, PEOPLE ARE DEPENDENT UPON STAYING connected to friends, family and the world, and are relying on electronic devices and social media to do so. Some people check or use their phone hundreds of times in a day. In healthcare, where Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance is required, social media and cell phone use pose potential problems for workers and patients.

OBJECTIVE 1: ADDRESS SOCIAL MEDIA AND CELL PHONE DEPENDENCE

Computers and the internet are necessary tools in Central Service (CS). The use of computers to identify, assemble and track surgical instruments is on the rise. Computers have contributed to increased productivity, enhanced skills and quality outcomes. Computers and the internet allow for the world to stay connected through searches, social media and email.

Social media and the need to “stay connected” has created a new mental health syndrome known as FOMO (the fear of missing out). FOMO is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having exciting experiences from which one is absent. FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. Allowing or disallowing the use of cell phones and social media in the workplace may directly impact performance, outcomes and staff morale.

Social media provides access to friends

and acquaintances; however, many healthcare facilities can also be found on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other platforms. These facilities may encourage their staff to like and share their posts, and add positive comments. When staff members offer a positive view on their facility, this becomes a form of free advertising. Potential problems from employees using social media occur when employees are posting instead of productively working – or when employees post updates that breach confidentiality.

HIPAA protects privileged health information, such as patient identifiable information, and prevents inappropriate access to such information. Healthcare workers are required to comply with HIPAA at all times. This means even when they are not at work, they cannot discuss patients with any identifiable markers. Even discussing a patient’s care, description or situation without demographics compromises HIPAA compliance if someone would be able to



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determine who an individual is talking about.

A breach of patient confidentiality may result in psychological damage to the individual who is the subject of that information. Patients enter a healthcare facility for a variety of reasons. Their surgery may be emergent or elective, and they may be familiar or even famous. Whatever the case, every patient deserves to be treated with the same respect and standards of care. The CS worker must be vigilant in protecting each patient's right to privacy and prevent an intentional confidentiality breach. Cell phone use is becoming a problem for employers because many employees view the use of their cell phone as an entitlement, regardless of their facility's cell phone policy.

OBJECTIVE 2: IDENTIFY ELECTRONIC USE PROBLEMS IN THE HEALTHCARE SETTING

The advancement of mobile devices has provided employees the opportunity to use devices for non-work-related activities, which creates a new threat to organizations. The use of personal devices and social media in the workplace is a form of counterproductive behavior with negative consequences. One study suggests that employees spend at least one hour per workday on non-work-related activities. Another study showed that approximately 30-50% of internet usage at work is non-work-related, causing annual losses of as much as \$1 billion.

Humans have an innate desire to be social and share interesting information. It is only natural for someone to want to tell others about a patient who had wonderful outcomes after a risky medical procedure, or if they had a famous singer as a patient. Healthcare employees not involved in direct patient care may believe they do not need to worry about confidentiality because they

are not providing direct patient care; however, this is not true. Working in CS, Certified Instrument Specialists may find themselves picking the surgical case items for a famous actress, or disassembling a case cart from a well-known politician. Even though CS professionals do not provide direct patient care, they are still required to follow HIPAA laws and not share patient information, unless there is a documented medical need.

In their professional roles, nurses and physicians are subjected to ethical and legal obligations to their patients; this includes the need to maintain the patient's privacy and confidentiality. These standards also pertain to all hospital workers, including those in CS. The use of cell phones in healthcare has resulted in many patient privacy violations and has led to lawsuits and employee terminations.

Many CS workers may feel the need to carry their cell phone on themselves and will claim a work-related reason for its use. For example, a cell phone is convenient for taking pictures of a tray with a retained sharp, or of a co-worker's workstation that was not left in an appropriate condition; however, when taking a picture, it is essential to verify that there is no patient identifying information visible, such as a patient label or surgical case requisition.

There are times when advanced technology facilitates communication. The need to send information to a physician or co-worker may require a CIS technician to take a photo of confidential information and then email or text it. If the information is medically necessary, it is not violating HIPAA laws; however, if the information is incorrectly sent to the wrong person, this may pose a HIPAA violation.

The CS worker must be vigilant to ensure that any patient-related emails or photos do not violate any HIPAA



Taking into consideration FOMO and the increased dependence on staying connected, management must work to strike a balance between allowing electronic devices and social media access in the workplace with patient confidentiality and productivity. An easy way to implement this is to limit cell phone and social media use to break time and after work hours.

regulations, and that they are sent to the correct recipient.

OBJECTIVE 3: EXPLAIN THE RAMIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND CELL PHONE USE IN CENTRAL SERVICE

Healthcare workers have an ethical responsibility to not cause harm. This is not limited to physical or intentional harm. A simple social media post about a patient, hospital practice, or workplace situation can lead to unintended consequences. Social media should be used as a place to share personal information, not professional information. Even if something personally affected a healthcare worker, it should not be posted if it is professionally related. Posting professionally-related topics subjects an employee to the possibility of HIPAA violations.

A breach in patient confidentiality may have psychologically damaging effects on an individual who is the subject of the information. Patients seek healthcare because they need medical help. They deserve the utmost respect, and confidentiality contributes to their positive outcomes. A breach in confidentiality could have emotionally damaging effects. Sharing the patient's information on social media or simply telling a family member about the patient is a confidentiality breach.

An intentional confidentiality breach

may result in employment termination, a fine or civil lawsuit, or incarceration.

Is CS an area for personal items? CIS professionals must think about the amount of hazardous bacteria that may live on surfaces in CS. Do they want to bring those germs close to their face or take them home with them? An individual may wash their hands when they leave work, but they cannot as easily or readily wash their electronic devices.

Evidence has shown that cell phones and other electronic devices harbor bacteria and other microorganisms. Research recommends regular cleaning of these devices and thorough hand washing before and after use. The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses recommends that cell phones, tablets and other personal communication or handheld electronic equipment should be cleaned with a low-level disinfectant, in accordance with the manufacturer's Instructions for Use, before and after being brought into the perioperative setting.

Given this information, electronic devices such as cell phones should not be used in the CS area. Not only will this protect the user, it may also prevent cross contamination to our patients.

Taking into consideration FOMO and the increased dependence on staying connected, management must work to strike a balance between allowing electronic devices and social media

access in the workplace with patient confidentiality and productivity. An easy way to implement this is to limit cell phone and social media use to break time and after work hours. Each worker has the responsibility to follow their facility's policy for personal electronic devices. Policy compliance will protect the employer, employee and patient from possible ramifications of the use of social media and cell phones in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

With the increased dependency on electronic devices, it is necessary to balance social media and phone access in the workplace. It is everyone's responsibility to adhere to HIPAA regulations and the facility's social media and electronic device use policies. 

RESOURCES

Personal Internet Use: The use of personal mobile devices at the workplace. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815004280>.

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CIS Self-Study Lesson Plan Quiz - Confidentiality: Electronic Devices and Social Media in the Workplace

Lesson No. CIS 260 (Instrument Continuing Education - ICE) • Lesson expires March 2020

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OBJECTIVE 1

1. The acronym FOMO stands for:
 - a. For Other Messaging Options
 - b. Fear of Missing Out
 - c. From Our Management Office
 - d. For Our Mode of Operations
2. FOMO is characterized by the desire to:
 - a. Participate in gossip
 - b. Engage in online dating
 - c. Continually check email
 - d. Stay continually connected with what others are doing
3. Allowing or disallowing the use of cell phones and social media in the workplace may directly impact:
 - a. Performance
 - b. Outcomes
 - c. Staff morale
 - d. All the above
4. The use of computers to _____ surgical instruments is on the rise.
 - a. Clean, sharpen and repair
 - b. Identify, assemble and track
 - c. Purchase, pay and sort
 - d. Store, retrieve and distribute
5. Healthcare workers are required to comply with HIPAA at all times. This means even when they aren't at work, they can't discuss:
 - a. Their daily productivity
 - b. Their job responsibilities
 - c. Patients with any identifiable markers
 - d. Their wages

OBJECTIVE 2

6. One study suggests that employees spend at least one hour per workday on non-work-related activities.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 7. Central Service workers are not as impacted by HIPAA laws because they do not provide direct patient care.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 8. The use of cell phones in healthcare has resulted in many patient privacy violations and has led to many lawsuits and employee terminations.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 9. It is acceptable to take a photo of confidential information and email or text it if it is:
 - a. Medically necessary
 - b. For advertising purposes
 - c. Being sent to the correct person
 - d. Both A and C
- ## OBJECTIVE 3
10. A simple social media post about a patient, hospital practice or workplace situation can lead to unintended consequences.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 11. Intentional HIPAA violation may result in:
 - a. Termination
 - b. Incarceration
 - c. Promotion
 - d. Both A and B

12. Evidence has shown that cell phones and other electronic devices harbor:
 - a. Bacteria and microorganisms
 - b. Apps and messages
 - c. Pictures and quotes
 - d. Numbers and contacts
13. Cleaning personal electronic devices with a low-level disinfectant, in accordance with the manufacturer's Instructions for Use, should be performed before and after being brought into the:
 - a. Restroom
 - b. Locker room
 - c. Perioperative setting
 - d. Cafeteria
14. Each worker has the responsibility to follow their workplace personal electronic devices policy.
 - a. True
 - b. False
15. Cell phone and social media use should be limited to:
 - a. Break time
 - b. The first 15 minutes of a shift
 - c. After work hours
 - d. Both A and C

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