



# Sri Lanka Journal of Medicine

The Official Journal of the Kandy Society of Medicine

Volume. 28 No.2 July - December 2019

Biannually E-ISSN 2579-1990

Bar Code: 9 772579 199003

## Editors

Sulochana Wijetunga  
MBBS, MD,D. Path

Veranja Liyanapathirana  
MBBS, MPhil, Ph.D.

## Assistant Editors

Heshan Jayaweera MBBS,  
DCH, MD, MRCPCH

Shenal Thalgahagoda  
MBBS, MD, MRCPCH

## Editorial Board

Channa Ratnatunga FRCS

Neelakanthi Ratnatunga  
MD, Ph.D. D.Path, FRCP

S.A.M. Kularatne MBBS,  
MD, MRCP, FRCP, FCCP

Vajira Weerasinghe  
BDS, MPhil, Ph.D.

W.M.Tilakaratne BDS,  
MS, FDSRCS, Ph.D.,  
FRCPATH

P.V.R. Kumarasiri MBBS,  
MSc, MD

I.B. Gawarammana MBBS,  
MD, MRCP, FRCPE,  
Ph.D.

Thilini Rajapakse  
MBBS, MD, PhD

## Social media use and medical professionals

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines social media as “electronic communication platforms where users create online communities to share ideas, personal messages and other content such as videos”. Even though there are many social media platforms, Facebook appears to be the most commonly used social media in Sri Lanka.

Medical professionals, just like other members of the society, use social media regularly. While some networks such as LinkedIn and Research-gate are used for professional networking, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are widely used for personal networking.

The use of social media by medical professionals has led to a set of ethical and professionalism related issues globally. These include general ethical concerns as well as a novel set of concerns. An example of general ethical issues is posting of patient photos, investigation and radiological images with patient identifiers on social media, which could be considered as a breach of patient confidentiality.

Social media has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal lives. The nature of one’s posts and interactions on social media reflects on one’s professional life and career. The behavior of medical professionals on social media reflects both on the given individual and the profession itself. Therefore, potential issues that arise from medical professionals using social media have been recognized by the governing bodies for medical professionals in many countries and regulations have been implemented.

There is ongoing discussion as to what privacy settings professionals should adopt in social media. Areas of debate include issues such as whether doctors should accept friend requests from patients, should doctors offer advise on treatment on social media, and whether posting about a personal career development would be considered self-promotion.



**Editorial Board (contd.)**

A. Siribaddana MBBS, MD,  
MRCP

Charles Anthonypillei  
MBBS, MD

Eranga Siriweera MBBS,  
MD, D. Path

**Overseas members**

Michael Sedgwick BSc,  
MB ChB, MD, FRCP

Tissa Wijeratne MD,  
FRACP, FRCP, FAHA,  
FAAN

**Published by**

The Kandy Society of  
Medicine,  
General Hospital, Kandy

Tel: 081-2201702

Fax: 081- 2233336

Email: [theksm66@gmail.com](mailto:theksm66@gmail.com)

Website: [www.theksm.org](http://www.theksm.org)

**Typesetting:**

Mr. Sampath Navaratne

Social media has also opened up a more direct line of interactions between the general public and medical professionals. This can be used effectively to communicate health education material. However, there is also a risk for fake news and misinformation being propagated in social media, particularly when they are shared by the likes of doctors.

Furthermore, to what extent should medical professionals discuss politics and disclose their political affiliations? How should doctors engage with social media on matters of religious and ethnic nature?

Obviously, medical professionals, just like anyone else in society, have a freedom to express their views. However, would that make patients feel unsafe?

The Sri Lankan health sector needs to consider these issues and develop strategies where social media is used effectively to promote health, avoiding any ethical concerns. Further, medical schools should consider introducing the ethical use of social media and develop skills such as identifying fake news among their undergraduates.

**References**

- 1 American Medical Association. Professionalism in the Use of Social Media. Available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/professionalism-use-social-media>.
- 2 General Medical Council. Doctors' use of social media. Available at <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/doctors-use-of-social-media/doctors-use-of-social-media>
- 3 Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. Social media: How to meet your obligations under the National Law. Available at <https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Policies/Social-media-guidance.aspx>

Veranja Liyanapathirana

Department of Microbiology,

Faculty of Medicine,

University of Peradeniya

Email: [veranjacl@yahoo.com](mailto:veranjacl@yahoo.com), [veranjacl@pdn.ac.lk](mailto:veranjacl@pdn.ac.lk)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4356-2172>

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4038/sljm.v28i2.139>