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Learning, Leading, Changing

SOCIAL MEDIA & SOCIAL WORK ETHICS

Voshel, E.M. & Wesala, A. (2015). Social media & social work ethics: Determining best practices in an ambiguous reality. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, 12*(1), 67-76.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article discusses the importance **of developing risk management strategies and provides recommendations for the ethical use of social media for social workers**. It addresses the need for social workers to stay focused on maintaining client privacy while simultaneously establishing and maintaining their professional and personal boundaries. It also highlights the development of comprehensive social media guidelines/policies and training that focuses on effectively preparing new social workers for the ethical challenges they will confront in the global world of social media.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

The social work profession should revise its standards of practice to meet the challenges presented by the Internet and technological advances. Social workers need to expand the way they think about ethics to include online social media, and reframe how they think about privacy, confidentiality, and professional boundaries. The development of explicit guidelines/policies for social work practitioners will help to clarify some of the current ambiguities that exist related to the use of social media, particularly as it relates to ethical practice as well as in training the next generation of social workers during their field placements. Recommendations for the ethical use of social media include:

- Discuss online pirvacy issues with clients and offer alternative, appropriate means of communication (cell phone, email, etc)
- Review online identity content and take approporiate security precautions before posting anything
- Become familiar with personal social media account settings and limit undesired access to personal information
- Conduct personal Internet search and have innaccurate or clinically inappropriate information removed
- Create professional website with relavant links or purchase a domain name to reduce online misrepresentation

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Agencies and schools of social work must facilitate a stronger foundation for ethical social work practice with social media going forward, through the development of social media guidelines/policies and when educating students on ethical use of social media. Social workers do not need to fear social media, but they do need to understand it, and make a place for it in their policy development and ethical awareness.