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|  DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF MEDICINE Mobile Device Usage for Students Guideline | Responsible unit: Undergraduate Medical Education | Established: December 4, 2025 Last revised: |
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A. Background & Purpose

Mobile devices are an integral part of how we communicate and are regularly used to aid patient management. While useful, it is important to acknowledge how these devices are used. This includes using them in the presence of others, e.g. patients, colleagues, teachers, and other health care professionals, and collecting information on the device. Outside the hospital, it is common and often culturally acceptable to be simultaneously communicating in a small group while using a mobile device. The dynamics in the hospital and learning environment are different and require attention to professionalism. In this light, these considerations are suggested as guidance.

This guideline is subject to Faculty of Medicine and Dalhousie University regulations/policies regarding:

- [Faculty of Medicine Professionalism Policy](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct](#)
- [Dalhousie University Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- [Dalhousie University Social Media Response Guidelines](#)

B. Application

This policy applies to Dalhousie and visiting undergraduate medical students participating in medical education sessions including clinical and research activities on campus and within affiliated environments.

C. Definitions

App: This is short for an application that is typically a small, specialized program downloaded to a mobile device

Mobile Device: A laptop computer or pocket-sized computing device that includes a display screen that allows input via touch or a miniature keyboard. A mobile device includes but is not limited to: laptop computer, tablet computer, cellular phone, smart phone, smartwatch and pagers.

Remote Access: communication with a health authority information systems or network using a mobile device from a remote location or facility through a public-accessible data link (internet or modem).

Personal Health Information: includes information about an individual related to the following:

- Physical or mental health
- Health service provided to that individual
- Registration information
- Images including photographs

Social Media Platform: includes any internet-based system, including those accessed through an app, through which users can create and/or share content for building social networks and relationships or for advertising. The platforms include but are not limited to: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Youtube, Google+, and Tiktok.

D. Guideline

Cellphones and pagers are commonplace in the medical environment and are to be used only for professional reasons in the patient/learning environment unless there is a personal emergency.

Announcing intended use is an important part of professionalism (Students should be provided with a set of example statements to indicate professional use, such as: 'I'm reviewing the guideline for this patient.' This helps make expectations clear and provides practical prompts they can use in different situations). The use of mobile devices for information gathering and sharing of personal information must be done securely.

Personal health information should never be posted on a social media platform.

E. Procedures

- Students may be contacted as part of their work duties when on call and may include the use of a pager or cellphone (depending upon the hospital or clinics' policies and procedures). It is usually accepted that a page or call in this case requires a prompt response. When responding to such a page or cellphone call, students should excuse themselves from the patient, teacher, etc., answer the page, and return to their previous activity as soon as possible.
- Mobile devices should be on silent mode during patient interactions, learning sessions or other situations that involve engaging with patients or colleagues. Although it may be commonplace to text or answer a cellphone while talking informally outside of the hospital environment, it is considered unprofessional to do so for personal/social reasons during any patient encounter or small group session/meeting. Exceptions would include a personal emergency or evolving personal situation that requires immediate attention.
- When texting for professional purposes, avoid any patient identifying information in the text. It is preferable to use institution approved secure apps or secure email accounts rather than regular cellphone texting to ensure communication is safe, professional, and compliant with privacy regulations.

- Use of mobile devices to access personal health information by students is not permitted unless pre-authorized by their education program and the appropriate health authority information technology services.
- Personal health information (including name, identification number, photos, video, audio or text) must not be saved permanently on a mobile device. Any information collected must be saved as appropriate to the health authority information system and permanently removed from the mobile device as soon as possible. Any saved images must follow the consent policies and procedures of the health authority. A phased approach should be followed when capturing and deleting media to ensure consistent quality and compliance with patient privacy standards, for example:
 - Obtain supervisor approval and patient consent before capturing any media.
 - Use the media only for the immediate, approved purpose.
 - Delete promptly once the objective is completed
- Photos, videos or audio recordings of patients, including close-up pictures of wounds, rashes, etc., must not be taken, except in exceptional circumstances when required by a student's supervisor for the immediate care of the patient. In this latter situation, the photos or recording should be deleted once the patient's concerns have been addressed.
- Photographs or videos taken within the hospital must not include patients or other health professionals without their explicit consent.
- Photographs and personal health information must not be shared through an unsecure network.
- Students must be aware of and abide by the specific institutional policies depending on where they are working.