The Posting of Unprofessional Content Online by Nursing Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the issues surrounding the posting of unprofessional content online among nursing students in the United States. Confidential surveys were sent through an online survey tool called Qualtrics, via email, to all deans and directors of 1,107 Bachelor's Degree and/or Associate Degree nursing programs that are accredited through the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the National League for Nursing (NLN). The survey yielded both quantitative and qualitative responses. Initial findings revealed that 76% surveyed had encountered at least one incident in the past year of a student posting unprofessional content online. The qualitative data was accessed from an open-ended question that asked respondents to describe an incident at their own school where a student posted unprofessional content online. Five themes emerged from the responses which include; sexually related content, affiliation with school, intoxication or substance use, violations of patient confidentiality, and cyberbullying. In conclusion, it was determined that nursing students need additional education to develop the professional behaviors that must be maintained when utilizing social media and networking sites.

The Posting of Unprofessional Content Online by Nursing Students

Social media and networking use is becoming more prevalent among people of all ages, backgrounds, professions (Pew Research Center, 2010). As of 2012, young adults ages 18-30 make up the largest users of social media and networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2013). A subgroup that makes up that population of users includes college students, more specifically healthcare students enrolled in various programs. A survey conducted by researchers at the University of New Hampshire among 1,127 current students from various majors revealed that on a typical day 96% utilize Facebook, 84% YouTube, 20% Blogs, 14% Twitter, 12% MySpace, 10% LinkedIn (Capano, Deris, & Desjardins, 2010). Hussain (2012) found that out of 600 students attending the Islamia University of Bahawalpur- Pakistan, on average 71.4% of students utilize social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Web-blogs, and google group. These studies reveal the popularity of social media use among college students from various backgrounds not only in the United States, but abroad.

Healthcare students who utilize these information sharing mediums, are presented with many benefits. Potentially, social media may serve to assist students gain a greater understanding of communication, professionalism, healthcare policy, and ethics (Wink, 2010). The increase use of social networking sites can allow healthcare students, more specifically, student nurses, to establish professional networks, exchange knowledge among peers and classmates, share nursing or healthcare related information, including research and best practices, and it is also an efficient way to bring nursing and healthcare issues to individuals who are not familiar with current nursing and healthcare trends (National Student Nurse Association, n.d.).

Although there are benefits to the use of social networking and social media among healthcare students, there are serious disadvantages that may occur from the misuse of those mediums. Some of the issues that have surfaced have included incidences of students posting unprofessional pictures or comments in blogs, or on social networking sites (Spector & Kappel, 2012). One incident occurred in Kansas, when four nursing students posted pictures of themselves and a human placenta on Facebook, after a clinical rotation at a hospital. Those students were eventually expelled from their nursing program because their act was seen as unprofessional and inappropriate (Hollingsworth, 2011). Students also risk breeching patient privacy and confidentiality, displaying unethical conduct, and more currently the increasing involvement in cyberbullying (Spector & Kappel, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Cyberbullying is defined as "the use of Internet, cellphones, or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person (National Crime Prevention Council, 2010). In relation to higher education, this can occur against peers, faculty and or colleagues.

All the actions described must be addressed because the content that health professionals post on their personal social networking site pages can affect the patient-health professional relationship, the healthcare organization, and the profession at large (Spector & Kappel, 2012; Melnik, 2013; Cronquist & Spector, 2011).

Review of the literature

CINAHL and MEDLINE databases were reviewed and revealed a dearth of literature and studies that focus on unprofessional content posted online by nursing students. The studies that were found have been conducted among medical and pharmacy students and their use of social media. Similar themes have surfaced from those studies

done on social media use and professionalism. Some of the top themes found included: students violating patient confidentiality and privacy, violating ethical standards, posting unprofessional content, and bullying amongst peers, faculty and colleagues. The following section will explain the findings in greater detail.

Patient Privacy and Social Media

The American Nurse Association (ANA) and National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) has begun to realize that the increased use of social networking sites present potential problems of students violating patient privacy and confidentiality (ANA, 2011; NCSBN, 2011). A study done by Chretien, Greyson, Chretien, and Kind (2009) on the prevalence of unprofessional content posted online by medical students found that 13% of 130 medical schools surveyed in the United States, had incidents in which medical students posted information online that violated patient confidentiality. Another study conducted among deans and proxies of 60 pharmacy programs in the United States found that 7% of those surveyed reported incidents in which pharmacy students violated patient confidentiality (Kjos & Ricci, 2012).

Eighty-eight surgical residents and 127 faculty at Vanderbilt University Medical Center were surveyed on the settings and content contained on their Facebook profiles. The results showed that 64% residents and 22% faculty had an active Facebook account. Of those, 50% had public profiles and 14% contained postings that violated patient privacy (Landman, Shelton, Kauffmann, & Dattilo, 2010).

Lagu, Kaufman, Asch, and Armstrong (2008) conducted a study in which they looked at the content of 271 medical blogs written by either nurses or doctors and found that of the 271 blogs examined 48 (17.7%) portrayed patients in a negative manner. They

also found that in blogs that described patient interactions, 45 (16.6%) included enough information for patients to identify themselves or their doctors.

By law, all health professionals and healthcare students nationwide in the United States are required to adhere to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) (Hader & Brown, 2010). This act protects a patient's personal identifying information and medical condition from being transmitted or shared orally, electronically, or in written form, to anyone who is not directly involved in the care of the patient. Some examples of patient identifying information would include the patient's name, address, birth date, social security number, full face or comparable images. Other information may include details of medical conditions or procedures, or any other information that might be able to be used to identify the patient (Hader & Brown, 2010). This act decreases the risk of the patient's health information being accessed or identified by anyone outside the care of the patient.

Healthcare professionals, who violate HIPPA law, face revocation of their professional and a substantial financial fine (Knudson, 2012; NCSBN, 2011; Spector & Kappel, 2012). Healthcare students face dismissal from clinical sites, expulsions from their professional program, and significant fines (Spector & Kappel, 2012; Hader & Brown, 2010). Additionally, students in the healthcare field must be cognizant of what they share online and make sure they are not violating laws.

Ethics and Social Media

As mentioned previously, students may be able to learn more about professional conduct in the online environment. On one hand students risk a great deal if they do not understand or consider ethics, when utilizing mediums such as Facebook and Twitter.

Ethics is described as determining right from wrong conduct. The American Nurses Association has published a code of ethics for nurses which states that nurses have an obligation to treat patients and colleagues with dignity and strive to protect the health, safety, and rights of the patient (Fowler, 2010). The National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) also published a code of ethics that states that student nurses have a responsibility to adhere to the code of ethics which help guides nursing students in "ethical analysis of responsibilities, professional conduct, and decision making in academic and clinical settings" (NSNA, n.d.).

Nursing students lack the knowledge and experience in order to make intelligent ethical decisions, when posting content online. This is supported by a study conducted by Englund, Chappy, Jambunathan, and Gohdes (2012) which assessed nursing students' understanding of ethical reasoning and social media use. This study compared second semester nursing students (who just entered the professional component of the nursing program) and second semester senior nursing students (who were in their last semester of nursing school) and found that most first semester nursing students had a difficult time distinguishing if a particular statement presented was ethical or not to post online. The second semester seniors showed an increased sense of ethical reasoning and knowledge, but still lacked certainty if particular statements were deemed ethical or not to post online.

This study further reveals that although ethics is a concept taught in class, students may need more education and real-life experience in order to fully comprehend the implications of maintaining ethical standards, when using social media (2012).

Unprofessional Content and Social Media

Many healthcare students are unable to recognize or are unaware that what they post online is a direct reflection of them as a professional. Students have a false sense that what they post online is private to only the people they want to see the information. But evidence shows that once information is posted online, it is freely available and findable to employers, potential schools, patients, and other colleagues (Holland, 2010).

Thompson et al. (2008) conducted a study in which they searched the profiles of 322 medical students and 40 residents at the University of Florida, Gainesville. They checked whether to see if a student's profile was private or public, and if they contained any unprofessional content. They found that 62.7 % of the students surveyed kept their accounts public. Of those profiles, they took a random sample of 10 and found that 3 of the profiles had unprofessional content readily accessible. Some things included pictures with alcohol, overt sexuality, foul language, and patient privacy violations that occurred outside the U.S.

A study done by Chretien, Greyson, Chretien, and Kind (2009) served as the foundation of the current project. The authors assessed the prevalence and types of unprofessional content posted online among medical students in the United States. They found that 60% of the 130 medical schools surveyed reported having had incidents in which students posted unprofessional content. Some of the unprofessional situations cited included; posting sexually suggestive pictures and comments, intoxication, use of profanity and discriminatory language, and negative comments about school, faculty or classmates.

Kjos and Ricci surveyed deans and proxies at 111 pharmacy programs in the United States of the prevalence of unprofessional content posted online by pharmacy

students. Sixty schools completed the survey. They found that more than half of those surveyed (52%; 31/60) reported incidents in which students posted unprofessional content online. Seventy-five percent (22/30) of schools with known student incidents reported having 5 or fewer incidents within the past year (2012).

Fifty-six medical students at the University of Lancaster in the United Kingdom completed an anonymous survey which accessed their behaviors on online social networking sites. The researchers found that 96% surveyed had a Facebook account. Of those with an account, 52% admitted having photos on their page that contained embarrassing content and 54% reported observing unprofessional behavior by their colleagues on Facebook, such as excessive alcohol consumption, various stages of undress, and descriptions of clinical experiences (Garner & O'Sullivan, 2010).

Weed, Kincheloe, and Lack (n.d.) performed a qualitative assessment of the Facebook profiles of 103 graduate students majoring in psychology. Fifty-five of the 103 students had Facebook accounts. Twenty-five of the 55 profiles were public. Of the 25 profiles that were accessible, 36% of them displayed alcohol usage or content, 32% contained sexual content, and 4% contained some form of profanity.

Although mentioned previously, we must be careful to keep to the message about online postings versus professionalism. It can have positive or negative effects on the healthcare provider-patient relationship. Unprofessionalism may alter an individual's and an entire profession's reputation. It may also prevent one from obtaining future employment.

Privacy Settings and Social Media Policies

Students might not completely understand privacy settings and restricting access, when utilizing social media sites. Thompson, Dawson, Ferdig, Black, Boyer, Coutts and Black (2008) found that 62.7 % of the 363 medical students and residents surveyed for online professional activities had publicly accessible Facebook pages.

The Facebook profiles of 200 medical students applying to an orthopedic surgery residency at University of Alabama Birmingham were reviewed for privacy settings and many other variables. Eighty-five percent of those reviewed did not restrict access to their profile page (Ponce, Determann, Boohaker, Sheppard, McGwin, & Theiss, 2013).

Williams, Field, and James (2011) looked at 297 first year pharmacy students at four different college campuses and evaluated the privacy settings of their profiles at 3 different intervals within then school year. The researchers reviewed the profiles before the students were introduced to a social media policy, after the students were informed of the social media policy, and at the end of the semester. They found that more students' profiles went from not being found when searching, to being found by the end of the semester.

Weed, Kincheloe, Lack (n.d.) found that 55 of the 103 graduate level psychology students in their survey had Facebook accounts. Of those accounts, 45.5 % of students' pages were viewable to the public.

Healthcare Student Perception of Social Media Use

Cain, Scott, and Akers (2009) administered a survey to 299 incoming pharmacy students attending 3 different schools in order to determine their online posting behaviors and beliefs. They found that 75% (159) of students indicated that their persona on Facebook accurately represents who they are as a future professional in the healthcare

field. They also found that 69.3% of those surveyed also felt that healthcare students should be held to a higher standard, when presenting themselves online.

Peluchette and Karl surveyed 433 undergraduate students' perceptions regarding information that is shared and posted online. Twenty percent revealed that they had information on their social networking site that they would not want a current employer to see. Some of the things that students did not want employers to see included: drinking and alcohol related pictures and comments, party photos, inappropriate humor, and comments about work (2008). They concluded that students are naïve about the information they post online and that it could have negative consequences for students.

Chretien, Goldman, Beckman, and Kind (2010) conducted a qualitative study on medical students and their perspectives regarding online posting. The study included 64 medical students who varied in their years within medical school. The researchers found that many students reported sometimes posting things in reference to classes, exams, or rotations. The majority of students' surveyed agreed that information or details that could lead to potential patient privacy violations were inappropriate to post online. The students waivered in their views as to what is appropriate or not to post when it came to things such as pictures depicting alcohol, sexually suggestive photos and speaking poorly about other physicians, their school, or other classmates. Those surveyed felt that guidelines for online use are not needed and that students should use common sense, when posting information online. Many students lacked the knowledge that their online behaviors could have repercussions for not only themselves, but their school and the medical profession at large. Students agreed that things should be done to raise awareness of issues involving online professionalism.

Finally, Finn, Garner, and Sawdon (2010) conducted a focus group among 72 undergraduate students at two medical schools and found that students viewed professionalism as being mainly important in the clinical or hospital setting.

Prevalence of Cyberbullying in Higher Education

Cyberbullying was thought to be something that occurs in high schools and middle schools, but now research is showing that it is manifesting itself into higher education. Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham, Rich (2012) studied the prevalence of cyber-harassment also known as cyberbullying, by surveying 1,368 students from two Canadian universities and one U.S. university. They found that 33.6% of those surveyed were cyber-harassed in high school and 351 of the 1,368 participants had been cyber-harassed at least once or twice, while in college.

At a university in Turkey, 666 students from 15 different programs were surveyed for incidences of cyberbullying and results showed 55.3% of them admitted to being victims of cyberbullying at least once in their life (Dilmac, 2009). Schenk and Fremouw further went to show that 8.6% (69) of 799 participants between the ages of 18-24 from the United States, met criterion in their study to be classified as a victim of cyberbullying (2011).

Another study examined a series of bullying behaviors among 439 college students from a university located in the Midwest. The researchers found that 38% of the students knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 21.9% were cyberbullied themselves, and 8.6% had cyberbullied someone else. The cyberbullying results reflected incidents that have occurred during attendance at college (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010).

Occurrences of cyberbullying are not only found outside the classroom, but also in the online learning environment. Clark, Werth, and Ahten (2012) conducted a study in which they accessed incivility in the online learning environment. Incivility is defined as any rude or disruptive behavior that results in psychological or physiological distress for the people involved (Clark & Davis-Kenaley, 2011). They found that the top uncivil student behaviors reported by both faculty and students that occur online include; students engaging in name-calling, making verbal insults or rude comments, making racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious slurs, and criticizing nontraditional subcultures (Clark, Werth, & Ahten, 2012).

Faculty are not exempt from experiencing cyberbullying in the online learning environment. Minor, Smith, and Brashen (2013) surveyed 346 online instructors from undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. The instructors were from the College of Management and Technology, an online university. Sixty–eight surveys were completed. Of the completed surveys, 33.8% of faculty admitted to being cyberbullied in the online classroom and 4.4% were unsure. The types of ways that professors where cyberbullied included; verbal abuse, threats of lawsuits, threatening to complain to a superior, and public defamation of character. Some venues where cyberbullying occurred against faculty included; discussion boards and forums, through emails, and on websites such as Facebook and Rate My Professor. The faculty were also asked if there were resources available to help with properly handling cyberbullying situations and 39.7% said yes, 20.6% said no, and 39.7% were unaware of any.

The literature review reveals the dangers of social networking use among healthcare students. Students do not fully understand patient privacy laws or the ethical

and professional standards that must be maintained, when utilizing social networking sites. There are no known studies that reveal the types of unprofessional content that is posted online by nursing students. Many articles cite how big of an issue that it is becoming, but there have been no definite studies to show how much of an issue it is. This study will help bring awareness to deans, faculty, and students nationwide on the prevalence and types of content that is posted online amongst nursing students.

Methods

The current study investigated the issues surrounding the posting of unprofessional content online among nursing students in the United States. The population sampled included deans and directors of healthcare programs in the United States at 1,107 schools with accredited Bachelor's Degree and/or Associate Degree nursing programs. These are the people most likely involved in incidents of student professionalism issues. That position makes this group most qualified to complete the survey. There was a 26% response rate with 293 schools completing the survey.

The instrument used was a confidential survey developed by Chretien, Greyson, and Kind (2009) and modified with permissions. It was administered via email through an online survey tool called Qualtrics. The survey contained four main categories; school and respondent characteristics, incidents of student posted unprofessional content online, level of concern among deans and directors, and institutional policies and resources. Permission was obtained from the UW-Oshkosh Institutional Review Board (IRB). Surveys were sent out in two batches. After the first response rate was low, a second survey went out with an improved response.

Data Analysis

This study yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 11.5. The qualitative data were derived from one open ended question asked of the respondents. The question generated a number of responses, which were then examined and analyzed for keywords and placed into common categories. Those categories were further analyzed and placed into broad themes. For the purposes of this paper, the qualitative results will be explained in greater detail.

Findings

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data revealed that 76.6 % of the 293 respondents were aware of incidents of unprofessional content posted online by nursing students at their own school, 45.5% were aware of incidents at other schools and 20% were unsure of any incidents. The number of specific types of incidents of unprofessional content reported by schools included: 69 incidents of violation of patient confidentiality, 95 incidents of profanity, 84 incidents of use of discriminatory language, 41 depicted intoxication, 39 sexually suggestive, and 64 incidents of students posting negative comments about patients, peers, their work environment, or the nursing profession. Of these incidents, 158 of them were reported and revealed to faculty by students. The other incidents were reported by faculty (111), non-faculty (26), patient or family member (2), student employer or clinical site (7) and other (38).

The respondents' overall level of concern about the posting of unprofessional content online was assessed using a 5 point Linkert scale, as well as their level of concern about the individual types of content that are posted. The survey revealed that overall

only 33% of respondents were “very concerned” about unprofessional content that is posted online. The majority of respondents 58% were only “moderately concerned” about unprofessional content posted online by nursing students. A minority of respondents 9% were either “minimally concerned” or “not concerned” of unprofessional content posted online by students. The level of concern about specific types of content posted online revealed that 66.4% surveyed were “highly concerned” about content posted that breeched patient confidentiality and 55.7% were “highly concerned” of content that included discriminatory language. The majority survey 80.7% were “highly concerned” about content posted that had some affiliation with the profession of nursing and 77.2% were “highly concerned” about content posted that was in affiliation with their institution. Other levels of concern about specific content are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Respondent’s Level of Concern about Specific Content
[High=4 or 5/ Moderate= 3, Low=1 or 2 on 5-point scale]

SPECIFIC CONTENT	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW
Patient Confidentiality	66.4%	20.9%	12.7%
Conflicts of Interest	29.9%	36.7%	33.4%
Profanity	44.6%	32.5%	23.0%
Discriminatory Language	55.7%	22.2%	22.1%
Depicted Intoxication	47.8%	21.3%	30.9%
Sexually suggestive material	48.4%	21.9%	29.7%
Affiliation with my school	77.2%	13.3%	9.5%
Affiliation with profession	80.7%	10.1%	9.0%
Other	65.0%	5.0%	35.0%

Respondents were also asked if their school's professionalism policies covered content posted online by students and if the policies specifically addressed blogs and social networking sites. The majority 69.9% said their policies covered student posted content online and 64.9% said that those policies specifically address blogs and social networking sites. A third of schools (35.4%) felt that although policies were in place, that they were not able to deal effectively with incidents that involved students posting unprofessional content online.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were derived from a single question which asked respondents to give an example of an incident they are aware of at their own school of nursing students posting unprofessional content online. This question generated 187 narrative responses. Some responses included more than one example of incidents that have occurred at the respondent's school, and 5 respondents were unaware or had no incidents of unprofessional content posted online. The responses were placed into 5 broad themes. Four of the five themes found in this study were the same as themes derived from an earlier study done on online professionalism in medical students by Chretien, Greyson, Chretien, and Kind (2009). Those four themes included: sexual relational content, affiliation with school, intoxication or substance use, and threats to patient confidentiality. The one new theme that emerged from this study was cyberbullying.

Several responses did not fall into any particular theme; those responses included the use of profanity, discriminatory language about specific population groups, unprofessional emails to professors, cheating via online, two incidents of unprofessional

language in discussion posts, one incident involved texting, and one example was unclassifiable. The five themes are discussed in more depth in the following section.

Sexual relational content

Thirteen responses involved students posting content online that was sexually suggestive. Examples included: pictures with students posing in sexual poses, students dressed in minimal clothing, posting pictures of sexual organs, and posting comments that were sexual in nature.

Affiliation with School

Seventy-three responses contained examples of comments or pictures posted that were affiliated with the institution. Some examples involved students posting negative and inappropriate comments about faculty and staff, the nursing program, the institution, and clinical site and staff at specific clinical rotations. Several students posed inappropriately on websites in clothing that contained the school's logo. One respondent described an incident in which a student created a website that contained the college's logo, but it was a fake website posing as an official college website.

Intoxication or Substance use

Eighteen responses contained examples in which students posted comments about being "drunk". Many examples involved students posting pictures of themselves using drugs or alcohol. Others involved pictures in which students appeared intoxicated.

Threats to Patient Confidentiality

Thirty-five responses involved some type of information that could threaten patient privacy and confidentiality. Most of the examples provided involved students posting pictures of patients they cared for on their social networking sites. Other

examples involved students posting comments or writing blogs online that described patient interactions or contained patient identifying information. Other examples involved students taking pictures of patient information from their mobile devices.

Cyberbullying

There were 24 responses that can be identified as cyberbullying. Some examples include students utilizing social networking sites to threaten other peers. Others involve students posting negative or demeaning comments about other classmates. Other examples involve teasing, using profanity and other demeaning words, when referring to peers or classmates. One example described an incident in which two students exchanged words with one another on a social media site and the dispute continued in class the next day and caused a disruption within the classroom.

Discussion

This study revealed many surprising results. The majority of nursing schools surveyed 76.6% have encountered incidences of students posting unprofessional content online. The findings in this study are much higher than the percentages found in the studies conducted among medical and pharmacy students (Chretien, Greyson, Chretien, & Kind, 2009; Kjos & Ricci, 2012). This shows how prevalent this issue is within nursing programs in the United States. The most commonly reported incidents included students using profanity and other types of discriminatory language online. Although Cain et al. showed that the majority of pharmacy students were aware that their Facebook persona directly reflected them as a future professional, Chretien et al.'s study revealed that students are still unsure if certain things are appropriate to post online such as; alcohol use, sexually suggestive pictures, profanity, etc. (2009; 2010). It would be useful

to see how nursing students utilize and perceive social networking sites. Overall, students should be educated not only on the importance of professionalism in the clinical setting, but also outside of the clinical setting.

Another finding is that most of the incidents were reported by students. Students have a false sense that they will only get caught for posting inappropriate things only if an authority figure such as an employer or school administrator accesses their page. This study demonstrated that it is not mainly faculty, but more often their own peers that turn them in for posting unprofessional content. Students need to be cognizant of what they post because although faculty may not be monitoring their page, their behavior can still be reported from other sources.

Researchers also found that only one-third of those surveyed were “very concerned” about students posting unprofessional content. The American Nurse Association (ANA) and National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) are aware of the growing issue of unprofessionalism in the online world, so they have teamed up to provide guidelines for both nurses and students to utilize and learn important concepts surrounding professionalism and social media (ANA,2011; NCSBN,2011) . Educators need to be more concerned and stress the importance of online professionalism, so that this does not continue to be a growing problem.

An interesting finding was that those surveyed were more concerned with students posting negative comments about their nursing program or the profession of nursing opposed to postings that breeched patient confidentiality. The researcher assumed that patient confidentiality would have been the major concern when it came to posting unprofessional content online. Provision three of the code of ethics states that nurses have

an obligation to protect the “safety and rights of the patient” (ANA, 2010). This provision is one of the most important ones for nurses, so it would be interesting to see what factors play a part in some people placing more importance on their institution and the nursing profession.

A little over a third of schools with policies in place felt like they were not able to effectively deal with incidents of students posting unprofessional content. This information shows that schools may need training or guidelines in place for addressing situations of student posted content. Skiba (2011) stresses the importance of having social media polices and plans in place to handle these type of situations. Educators should feel confident in addressing issues surrounding online professionalism since this study shows that it is a common trend.

The qualitative data revealed some interesting findings. The most significant finding was the increase trend of cyberbullying occurring against both faculty and peers. This theme was not found in the earlier study done on professionalism by Chretien et al. The results from this study reflect the increase trend of cyberbullying occurring in higher education (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010; Clark, Werth, & Ahten, 2012; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). A significant number of examples provided in this study, involved students posting negative comments about professors and or their nursing program in retaliation for not receiving a grade they wanted. The literature review reveals the growing trend of incivility within nursing education. This can range anywhere from students making insulting remarks to verbal and physical abuse against professors and peers (Clark & Springer, 2007). These types of incidents need to be addressed and taken seriously, before they escalate.

Another frequently cited example provided by respondents included instances of students posting comments about clinical or pictures of themselves with or without their patients on their social media sites. Students need to be made aware that even if they obtain permission to take a picture of a patient, they should not post it online because it is still a direct violation of patient confidentiality and /or agency policy. Students should also be constantly reminded that posting anything pertaining to clinical rotations should be avoided, regardless if it was a good or bad experience. The study by Englund et al. (2012) revealed that students do not fully understand the ethical implications when it comes to what's appropriate or not to post online. This knowledge reaffirms that students must be taught and reminded of these concepts.

Limitations

The study may be limited by several factors including sampling bias. Those already having experienced cyberprofessionalism incidents may have self-selected to respond based on the title of the online survey and thus the numbers of concerns reported may have been artificially inflated. Additionally the survey was sent out via email during the summer and this might have limited the total number of responses in the sample. Finally, despite sending the survey to the deans and directors of all accredited baccalaureate and associate degree nursing programs in the United States, the email address may have been inaccurate thus not reaching all programs.

Conclusion

Cyberprofessionalism is an important concern about nursing professionals and it appears that unprofessional online behavior among nursing students is prevalent. Educational institutions need to be proactive by implementing social media policies, and

making sure there are guidelines or committees in place to handle incidents of student posted unprofessional content. Faculty and students need to be educated on how to report and address incidents of cyberbullying. Students also need to be educated on ethical and professional standards that must be maintained in the clinical and non-clinical setting. If these things are addressed this could decrease the prevalence of this issue.

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