

# Cyber-Professionalism: The Posting of Unprofessional Content Online by Nursing Students

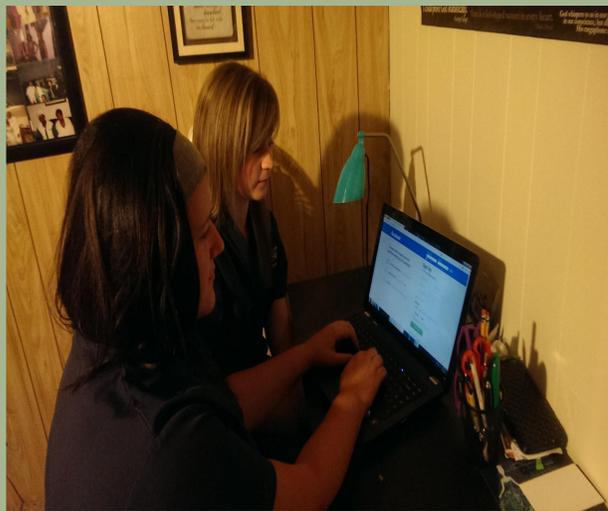
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## INTRODUCTION

Nursing students make up a subgroup of some of the largest users of social media and networking sites. These users are young adults ages 18-30. (Pew Research Center, 2013). Those students who utilize these information sharing media may gain many benefits. Potentially, social media may serve to assist students gain a greater understanding of communication, professionalism, healthcare policy, and ethics (Wink, 2010).

Although there are benefits to the use of social networking and social media among nursing 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). Students also risk breaching 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).

All the actions described must be addressed because the content that healthcare 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).



## OBJECTIVES

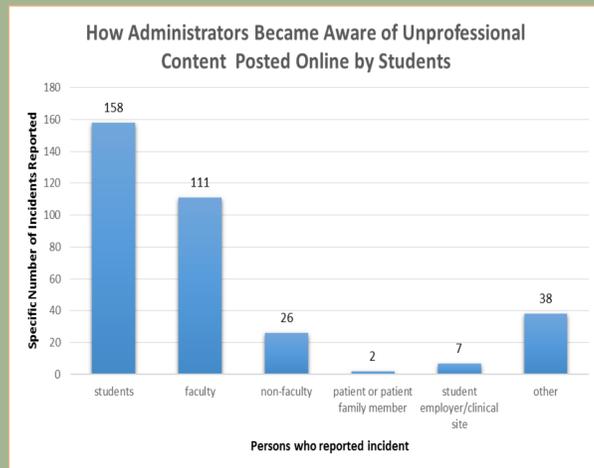
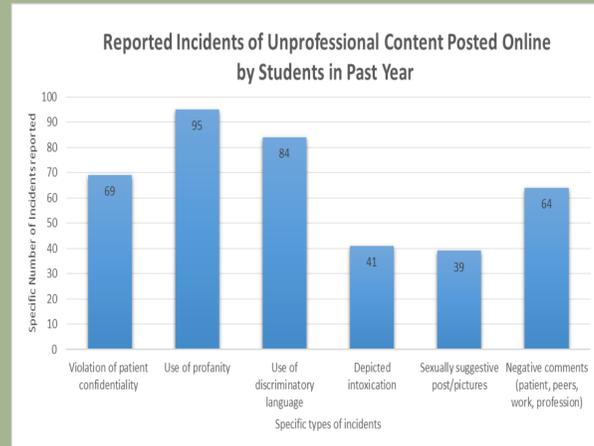
- To investigate the prevalence and issues surrounding the posting of unprofessional content online, among nursing students in the United States.

## METHODS

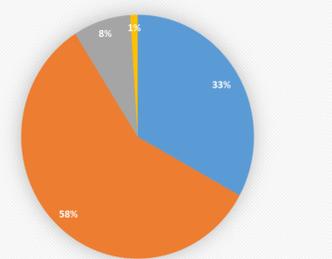
- Confidential surveys were sent through the online survey tool Qualtrics, via email, to all deans and directors of 1,107 Bachelor's Degree and/or Associate Degree nursing programs that are accredited through the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the National League for Nursing (NLN)
- Quantitative data were analyzed via SPSS 11.5
- Completed surveys were received from 293 respondents yielding a response rate of 26.5%

## FINDINGS

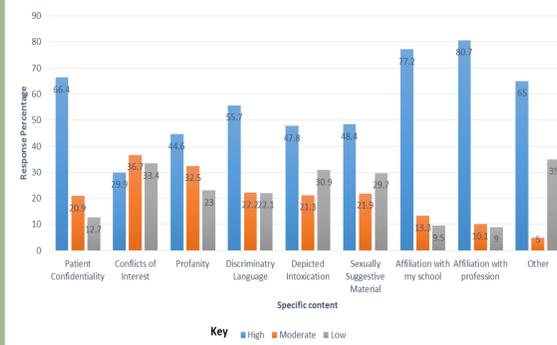
- 76.6 % of the 293 respondents surveyed were aware of incidents of unprofessional content posted online by nursing students at their own school, 45.5% were aware of incidents at other schools and 54.5% were unsure or unaware of any incidents at other schools



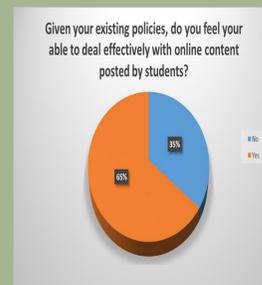
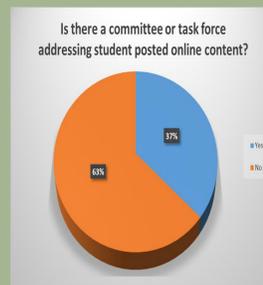
Respondents' Overall Level of Concern About Specific Content



Respondents' Level of Concern of Specific Content Posted by Students



- 69.9% of respondents said their school's professionalism policies cover student posted content online
- Of those surveyed, 64.9% said that those policies specifically address blogs and social networking sites



- Respondents were asked to give an example of an incident they are aware of at their own school of nursing students posting unprofessional content online, 187 narrative responses were generated that fell into 5 broad themes
  - Themes
    - Cyber-bullying (24 responses)
    - Sexual-relational content (13 responses)
    - Threats to patient confidentiality (35 responses)
    - Affiliation with school (73 responses)
    - Intoxication or substance use (18 responses)

## LIMITATIONS

- Those already having experienced cyber-professionalism 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.
- Only 26% of schools responded, which could be due to the survey being sent via email during the summer and that 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 addresses may have been inaccurate thus not reaching all programs.

## CONCLUSIONS

- 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.
- Students may need additional education on the standards that must be maintained online and in the non-clinical setting.
- Students need to be made aware that it is mainly their own peers who report them for unprofessional content online, and that professional peers may be obligated by ethical codes to report unprofessionalism or evidence of potential impairment.
- Educators and administrators need to make online professionalism a top concern. The content that students post online can reflect negatively on the institution and could cause the program to lose clinical placements and/or other privileges.
- Faculty and students should receive education on how to report and address incidents of cyberbullying.

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