

## **AANS Social Media Guidelines**

### **1. Background**

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) recognizes the influential role social media plays in patient education, marketing, branding, networking and the public's perception of our association, our specialty and organized neurosurgery.

"Social media" is a collective term for websites or applications that focus on communication via digital media and interaction with networks of individuals or companies. Social media includes any online platform where you may be interacting with others, such as X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn or Facebook; photo-sharing networks such as Instagram and Snapchat; video-sharing networks such as YouTube or TikTok; discussion forums such as Reddit; question- and answer-based networks such as Quora; and review forums such as Yelp or Google.

The AANS has developed the following guidelines for officers, directors, AANS committee members, AANS/Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) Joint Section leaders, AANS/CNS Joint Committee members and all AANS members regarding their engagement in social media. All AANS officers, directors, AANS committee members, AANS/CNS Joint Section leaders, AANS/CNS Joint Committee members and all AANS members should also refer to the AANS Code of Ethics as it pertains to one's professional engagements both inside and outside of the clinical setting.

### **2. Scope**

These guidelines apply to social media interactions posted by AANS officers, directors, AANS committee members, AANS/CNS Joint Section leaders, AANS/CNS Joint Committee members and all AANS members to social media platforms regarding the practice of neurological surgery, neurosurgical education, neurosurgical patients, colleagues and/or competitors and organized neurosurgery.

### **3. Social Media Copyright Concerns**

Violations of copyright policies and laws while posting on social media can have serious consequences for the AANS. Such adverse consequences include, but are not limited to, being named as a defendant in lawsuits and being required to pay significant statutory damages. To avoid claims for copyright infringement when posting on social media, the AANS encourages you to adhere to the following:

- Post original content whenever possible.
- If the use of third-party content (including images) is required, obtain a proper license covering the use and/or ask for permission. The AANS recommends that you consult with legal counsel to ensure that you have obtained a license or permission sufficient to use the third-party content.

- Use trending sounds (e.g., sound clips, music tracks or audio snippets that gain popularity and widespread usage on social media platforms) with caution and only when you have secured written permission to do so.

#### **4. Right of Publicity**

The right of publicity prevents the unauthorized commercial use of an individual's name, likeness or other recognizable aspects of one's persona. It gives an individual the exclusive right to license the use of their identity for commercial promotion. If you feature people in the content of a social media post, you must ensure that they sign a release form authorizing you to use their name, likeness or image. Although waivers are sometimes not required for purely educational content, the definition of what is considered "educational" is far from clear and can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. For this reason, it is far safer always to obtain a written release if a social media post contains a photographic image, portrait, voice recording and/or video of an individual.

#### **5. Personal Social Media Use**

All social media, regardless of privacy settings, should be considered to be visible to the public, including state medical boards and credentialing bodies. State medical boards have issued formal censures to physicians and other health care providers because of social media posts that contain false or misleading medical information and unduly violent, overly graphic or unprofessional content on their personal social media accounts. Personal social media accounts should be treated with the same integrity as professional accounts.

#### **6. Patient Communication**

AANS social media accounts should not be used to communicate with patients regarding their treatment, health status and/or condition. The AANS recommends that any communication with patients take place on a privacy-protected account rather than on a social media platform.

#### **7. Education vs. Personal Beliefs**

Neurosurgeons should be careful only to provide education through peer-reviewed resources and not use social media to educate based on personal beliefs or anecdotes. Similarly, the education of residents and other medical professionals should be held to the same standards as patient education with the use of peer-reviewed and widely known/accepted resources. Frequently, surgeons will use social media accounts to share cases and facilitate discussion to further education. While this may be an acceptable practice within the medical community, we must strive to maintain patient privacy at all costs.

#### **8. Professionalism**

When posting on social media, whether personally or professionally, it is imperative to consider the reputation of all parties involved: patients, other providers, the AANS, your practice and partners and organized neurosurgery. All posts and content should be held to

the utmost standards of professionalism and must be in full compliance with the AANS Code of Ethics. Posts shall not include hate speech or discriminatory language.

## **9. Training and Education**

The AANS will ensure that its officers, directors and committee members are informed about these social media guidelines, legal obligations and best practices. All AANS members who engage in social media should comply with these guidelines.

## **10. Framework for Consideration of Social Media Content**

This framework should be considered before posting content on any social media platform operated, managed and/or controlled by the AANS:

- a. Does the post benefit the AANS, an AANS/CNS Joint Section, an AANS/CNS Joint Committee, organized neurosurgery and/or my patients? If yes, proceed to (b). If not, do not post.
- b. Does the post align or comply with these AANS Social Media Guidelines and the AANS Code of Ethics? If yes, proceed to (c). If not, do not post or consider whether the post can be modified to comply with these Guidelines and the Code of Ethics.
- c. Does the post comply with the social media platform's terms of use? If yes, proceed to (d). If not, do not post or consider whether the post can be modified to comply with the platform's terms of use.
- d. If the post reveals protected health information, have you obtained written informed consent to publish the information? If yes, proceed to (e). If not, do not post.
- e. If the post includes a picture, portrait, video or voice recording of an individual, have you obtained a release to use the individual's name, likeness or image? If yes, proceed to (f). If not, do not post.
- f. If the post includes third-party content, have you obtained a license or other permission to use the content? If yes, proceed to (g). If not, do not post.
- g. Does the post reflect well on you, the AANS, an AANS/CNS Joint Section, an AANS/CNS Joint Committee and/or organized neurosurgery? If yes, you have thoughtfully created social media content and should publish the post. If not, reconsider and do not publish the post.

**Approved by the AANS Board of Directors on July 8, 2024**