Professionalism and Mobile Devices: Guidance for the Clinical Setting

Students participating in the iPad clerkship pilot project, as well as all students who use any type of mobile device in the clinical setting, need to pay careful attention to professionalism and etiquette when using these devices. Please see the guidelines below. We’ve also included some sample phrases that you can use with patients, based on physician experiences with these devices.

1. **Comply with all patient privacy policies.** Use all devices in accordance with HIPAA policies. Use strong passwords, log off all applications, save nothing to your device, take no photos nor videos, and treat any device you use in clinics with special care.

2. **Different sites, different rules.** In addition to varying degrees of Internet access at sites, there will also be variance as to how mobile devices are (or are not) used in different clinical settings. Avoid making assumptions about what is acceptable; ask site staff or your resident to advise you.

3. **Explain to your patient why you are using a mobile device.** Tell the patient what you are looking at on your mobile device, and gain their cooperation (“I will be looking at your medical record while I’m talking with you; is that okay?”).

4. **Be aware of your line of sight with the patient.** Position your mobile device so that you are directly facing your patient.

5. **Let your patient know if you will need to break eye contact for any sustained period of time.** Give them a signal in advance that you will be averting your eyes (“Please hold on for one minute while I type”).

6. **Avoid using your mobile device to check your email or do unrelated web searches in the presence of patients.**

7. **Where appropriate, engage the patient with information on the device.** Examples would include patient education, showing a patient his/her lab values or showing a parent his/her child’s progress on a growth chart.

8. **If you are not using the device, close it.** This maximizes the time when the patient senses that they have your full attention. Close your iPad; put your smartphone in your pocket.

9. **Practice.** The ability to utilize a mobile device while maintaining patient-centeredness is an art. Practice with friends and/or family, and ask for their feedback. Discuss challenges with your colleagues, learn from them, and share what works for you.

*Thanks to Dr. Clarence Braddock for sharing his own best practices in use of the iPad in the clinical setting.*