Background: While Facebook is an effective way to stay connected with friends and family, this avenue of communication can allow private, and sometimes inappropriate or unprofessional, content to be available for public consumption. We believe that most physicians would not desire to share certain information with their patient population or generic co-professionals. For this reason we developed a 15-minute educational primer on ways to secure information on Facebook that was given as part of the residency orientation program.

Methods: A list of 86 incoming house staff members at a single target institution was obtained and a dummy Facebook account was use to search for publically available information. We recorded the physicians who could be found on Facebook and presence or absence of additional contact information, personal views, photographs, and other personal and unprofessional content. Data were recorded prior to the primer and at two weeks and 1 year following the primer. In addition, baseline results were compared to results of a previously published study to assess resident behavioral trends on Facebook.

Results: At baseline, 32.6% of subjects were deemed searchable. Of the searchable subjects, 71.4% posted a personal photograph displaying their face and 10.7% had unprofessional photographs. House staff members who added the name of their institution following our intervention were significantly less likely to have publically available unprofessional photos compared to individuals who listed the name of their institution prior to our intervention ($p<0.05$). Further, compared to residents from a study published in 2008, residents in the current study were significantly less likely to publically publish their email address, phone number, sexual orientation, and political perspectives (all $p<0.05$). Residents in the current study were also significantly less likely to have additional photos involving alcohol consumption or party attendance than resident in the 2008 study ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: The current study underscores that self-published, personal, and sometimes unprofessional information is available for public consumption on social networking sites like Facebook. When compared to work previously published, our findings suggest that medical professionals are becoming more aware of personal information exposure. Continued educational efforts like our interventional pilot study are necessary to protect the integrity of the physician-patient relationship as we progress through the digital age.