Professor Gray was cited in an article posted to the MedCity News website that discusses the impact of social media on the healthcare industry.

The following article was posted to the MedCity News website on Friday, May 27, 2011 (available online at http://www.medcitynews.com/2011/05/social-media-and-healthcare-good-medicine-or-pretty-poison/):

Social Media and Healthcare: Good Medicine or Pretty Poison?
By Samantha Gluck

As social media continues to permeate nearly all aspects of the healthcare landscape, its growth as a medical practice tool is rapidly changing the face of medicine. Change of any kind brings with it both positive and negative outcomes. The number of physicians choosing to integrate social media and mobile computing devices into their practice protocols is steadily increasing; yet a considerable number of holdouts have reservations about utilizing the still-fledgling tool of the digital age.

iPads and Social Media Enhance Physician Communication

The Internet, with its countless healthcare and medical resources, has educated and empowered patients, making them more sophisticated and raising their expectations of care overall. Physicians can build stronger relationships with patients by communicating via social media channels. The portability and sheer computing power of the iPad and similar devices allows them to engage with patients and colleagues at anytime desired. Companies that design medical applications especially for mobile devices give doctors ready access to diagnostic tools, pharmaceutical drug databases, and electronic health records (EHRs). Healthcare providers can answer patient questions and provide links to valid medical information using these apps and their favorite social networking platforms.

Strengthening the Gold Standard

In person doctor visits represent the gold standard of healthcare. Nothing can replace this face-to-face meeting when it comes to effective care and satisfactory patient outcomes. Meaningful communication deepens relationships of all kinds – even the patient-physician one. Social media can enhance patient trust of physician treatment decisions and preventive measures, by providing them with a way to communicate meaningfully outside of the office visit.

A Tool for Educating the General Public

Social media can relay a message around the world in the blink of an eye. Physicians are using social media as a tool for promoting their practice websites or professional healthcare blogs to areas well outside their local practice area. Primary care providers (PCPs) and specialists can use the available social media platforms to disseminate valid, accurate health information to their local community and beyond rather than leaving these constituents to search out possibly dubious information on their own.

Think First, Tweet (or Blog) Second

The promise and potential this technology holds for the medical community to promote its professional and educational services to the public is enormous, but the technology carries with it potential to harm as well. According to Patricia Gray, JD, LLM of the University of Houston Law Center, medical schools have an increasing presence on social media sites. Gray spoke to staff and faculty at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) in 2010. In the seminar, she mentions that both the Association of American Medical Colleges and the NIH use social media platforms as do at least 540 United States hospitals.

Unprofessional posts and content by medical students and practicing physicians can damage their professional reputations and cause public trust of the medical profession to deteriorate. Gray relayed several statistics involving inappropriate blog posts and tweets by medical students and physicians captured during a 2008 social media research project conducted by her team: 42.1 percent of medical or
healthcare blogs described experiences with specific patients, 17.7 percent of the blogs spoke negatively about their patients, and 31.7 percent included derogatory remarks about the healthcare system at large; of 5,156 tweets analyzed, 50 percent related to medicine or healthcare, 12 percent involved physician tweets of self-promotion, 1 percent promoted a medical product or treatment, and 3 percent were deemed unprofessional or contained racial slurs and curse words.

Professional Etiquette: Vaccine Against Career Flatline

Every organization, institution, business, or non-profit that employs or educates human beings should develop a dynamic social media policy. The policy serves to protect the institution itself as well as the associate or staff member. UTMB regularly reminds medical students and all associates of the importance of maintaining professional etiquette standards when using social media. In their newsletter, *Impact Online*, an article entitled, *Getting in touch with social media*, lays out some basic guidelines for social media engagement aimed primarily at medical students and residents.

- Think before you post
- Once you post content, you relinquish control of its proliferation forever
- Even the strictest privacy settings do not ensure total security
- Do not access social media platforms during working hours
- All content posted on social media that identify you as affiliated with UTMB must include a disclaimer that the opinions expressed do not represent those of UTMB
- Never reveal confidential or exclusive information on the Internet
- Respect copyrighted material and post only with consent of the owner
- References to staff, faculty, students, or any person or organization associated with UTMB (including competitors) must be truthful and respectful
- Do not post any content that might put UTMB in a bad light or incite litigation

Those who engage in social networking, blogging, or commenting on blogs should consider their posts and uploaded photos as having permanent Internet presence. Even when deleted by the owner, rest assured a version of the post, tweet, or photo exists somewhere.

Final Considerations

The relationship between social media and healthcare is here to stay. Physicians can, and probably should, use these powerful mobile tools to enrich their professional prowess, promote efficient care, and increase patient satisfaction. When preparing a potential post, tweet, or comment, consider long-term consequences. Physicians in private practice should develop a working social media policy for their practice and require all staff, including themselves, adhere to the policy. Those in academic, education, or other public settings should ask for and carefully review the social media policy of their institution and closely abide by it.

*Poisons and medicine are oftentimes the same substance given with different intents.* ~Peter Mere Latham