

Managing Your Online Presence Part of ‘Professional Responsibility’

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Editor's note: The [2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition](#) will take place from Sept. 16-19 in Chicago.

When parents seek answers to medical questions online, you hope they find accurate information from a reliable source. But have you ever thought about what they will discover if they put your name into a search engine?

If you haven't, you better start now, said Bryan Vartabedian, MD, FAAP, a member of the AAP Council on Communications and Media.

"We can drive what people understand about us, or someone else is more than happy to do it for us," he said.

Dr. Vartabedian will advise pediatricians on how to take charge of their online presence during a session titled "The Public Pediatrician: Practical Strategies for Mastering Your Online Reputation." The session will be held from 7:30-8:15am Saturday (F1007) in McCormick Place West W180 and 2:00-2:45 pm Saturday (F1097) in McCormick Place, W178 B.

"I really want Fellows to come away with a clear understanding that looking after online presence is part of the new professional responsibility," he said. "We as physicians often see this as something optional or extra, but it's really the starting point for what people, and parents in our case, understand about us."

So, what can pediatricians do to influence what comes up on the first page of Google or Bing when people search for them by name?

Create content, said Dr. Vartabedian, assistant professor, Texas Children's Hospital/Baylor College of Medicine.

Content creation can be as simple as updating your public profile on sites such as LinkedIn and Healthgrades. Pediatricians also should consider writing original pieces for their hospital's or institution's blog, he said.

"We need to take ownership of what people see about us as opposed to hoping that there is good stuff about us or trying to get rid of things that don't look so good," Dr. Vartabedian said.

If a bad review does pop up, he advises against going on the defensive.

"There's an old saying in reputation management that 'the solution to pollution is dilution,'" Dr. Vartabedian explained. That means physicians should focus on creating an abundance of positive content that will drown out the negative.

"I'd really like to motivate this audience to believe that they can actually do things that will positively impact how they're perceived or potentially even how our field is perceived," he said.

For those who worry that they don't have time to attend to their online presence, Dr. Vartabedian offers reassurance that they can keep it simple. He said he limits his social media use and focuses only on his blog and Twitter to prevent himself from becoming overwhelmed.

During the session, he also will offer advice to keep from getting into sticky situations. He cautions, however, that there are no firm dos and don'ts.

"Our public presences are all driven by different motivations," he said. "Some of us are there to draw business to our practice. Some are there for true advocacy. Some have political aspirations, and so we have to start by thinking about what we want to achieve by being there."

Follow Dr. Vartabedian on Twitter [@doctor_v](#).

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