

**MEDICAL STUDENT'S TWEETS ON PATIENT INFO**

# Student suspended from clinic postings

She has been warned and counselled, will also face disciplinary action: NUS

By **AMELIA TENG**

THE National University of Singapore (NUS) medical student who tweeted about a patient's medical history has been suspended from clinical postings until investigations are over.

The final-year student has also been warned and counselled, and will face disciplinary action pending the outcome of the ongoing probe, said the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

From their third year of studies onwards, the school's medical students go through full-day clinical postings in hospitals, which last between two and eight weeks.

"The student is very remorseful over the actions

and apologises for causing offence and for any infringement," a spokesman for the school told The Straits Times.

The student sparked an uproar by posting two tweets containing the patient's pregnancy and abortion history on April 7, including a line: "Don't even wna look at this patient."

A screen shot of the tweets appeared on citizen journalism website Stomp last Friday, and has since attracted over 19,000 views, with many netizens questioning the student's sense of values.

The offending posts by the 22-year-old student, who stated her name as "Michelle Chia" on her Twitter account, have

since been deleted. Her Twitter and Facebook accounts were also deleted after the incident.

The medical school said that students have always been taught the importance of safeguarding their patient's records and confidences.

"We thus take this incident very seriously, and have reminded all students about their professional and medical responsibilities. Our students have also been warned that they will face disciplinary proceedings should they breach this very important ethical principle," said the spokesman.

NUS said students from other faculties who go on internships or attachments are also briefed on professionalism and ethical conduct before they start work.

Medical students must sign confidentiality agreements before they start

## Internship practices

■ **National University of Singapore:** Students are briefed on professionalism and ethical conduct before starting work.

■ **Singapore Management University:** Students must score at least 80 per cent on a test on workplace conduct.

■ **Nanyang Technological University:** Students attend a briefing on conduct.

■ Several hospitals, law firms and banks have confidentiality agreements that must be signed before staff, including interns, join them.

clinical training in hospitals, and social media etiquette is highlighted during career talks for law students, said an NUS spokesman.

At the Singapore Management University, students must pass a test on workplace conduct before starting internships - with a score of at least 80 per cent. For instance, they are tested on their knowledge of data confidentiality and professionalism.

Nanyang Technological University students, meanwhile, attend a briefing on conduct.

Organisations that offer internship opportunities for students also have guidelines in place.

Hospitals, law firms and banks interviewed by The Straits Times said they have a "code of con-

duct" that includes a section on patient or client confidentiality.

These are communicated to all staff, including interns, through confidentiality agreements that they sign before joining the organisation.

Said Drew & Napier director Kelvin Tan: "We want to get (trainees and interns) very involved in our matters so they can learn, but it is our paramount duty to protect our clients' confidential information."

At Changi General Hospital, staff, including interns and volunteers, are given a pocket guide with its code of practice.

Some also have specific guidelines on the use of social media, like reminding staff not to air their grievances online, and directing them to the correct channels.

"On top of our social media policy, we also highlight the risks of using online platforms at staff-engagement sessions," said Mrs Tan-Huang Shuo Mei, group director of SingHealth's communications and service quality division.

Staff are expected to behave in ways that are consistent with their personal and professional val-

ues, she added.

At OCBC Bank, employees have to abide by a code of conduct that includes taking responsibility for what they choose to post online, said Ms Jacinta Low, who heads the bank's human resource planning division.

Human resource experts said social media guidelines are useful.

Organisations should educate their staff on what is acceptable online and the consequences of violations, said Professor Tan Cheng Han, the chairman of the Media Literacy Council, which works with various groups to inculcate good online practices.

But enforcing such guidelines is not an easy task.

Said Singapore Human Resources Institute executive director David Ang: "Young people are very impulsive and may not be aware of the consequences of what they put online."

While there can be rules to guide behaviour, said Prof Tan, a person's sense of values is still the most effective guide.

"The most effective guide is still the 'internal guide' within a person, that is to say, a person's sense of values," he said.

"Responsibility and empathy, and in this case, also professionalism, are values that guide a person's words and actions."

He added: "Social media communications are still young and evolving - I think it is only a matter of time before users grasp what it means to communicate appropriately in a borderless, instantaneous world."

ateng@sph.com.sg

Additional Reporting by Kash Cheong



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