

**DIGITAL ETHICAL ATTITUDES AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS:
PHYSICIANS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA****Osman Mert Özcan¹, Sahabettin Çetin¹, Ahmet Furkan Kandemir², Furkan Bolat²**¹*Department of Psychiatry, Pamukkale University, Denizli, Türkiye*²*Faculty of Medicine, Pamukkale University, Denizli, Türkiye*

BACKGROUND AND AIM: Digital technologies and social media in healthcare increase ethical challenges in patient confidentiality, data security, and professionalism and expose medical students to dilemmas early in training. These challenges are particularly salient in psychiatric practice, where therapeutic relationships rely heavily on trust, confidentiality, and clearly defined professional boundaries. This study aimed to evaluate medical students' attitudes toward digital medical ethics scenarios and online privacy awareness, and to examine associations with clinical training level, social media use, and exposure to digital patient data.

METHODS: Cross-sectional study of 153 medical students. Measures: sociodemographic questionnaire; five researcher-developed digital medical ethics scenarios addressing patient confidentiality and professional boundaries, rated on a five-point Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.795-0.890$); and the Online Privacy Awareness Scale. Ethical approval was obtained on January 13, 2026 (Approval No: E-60116787-020-811447).

RESULTS: In S2 (communication with patients via social media), clinical students demonstrated stricter ethical attitudes ($p=0.013$). In patient image (S1) and patient-clinician dialogue

(S3) scenarios, students with higher social media use exhibited more flexible attitudes ($p=0.003$ and $p=0.006$). Students preferring surgical specialties showed more flexible attitudes in S3 ($p=0.042$). Regression analyses indicated that stricter attitudes in S1 were associated with social media use duration ($\beta=-0.259$, $p=0.001$) and exposure to digital patient data ($\beta=-0.160$, $p=0.049$), whereas stricter attitudes in S2 were associated with the communication subdimension of online privacy awareness ($\beta=0.480$, $p<0.001$).

CONCLUSION: Digital medical ethics attitudes are associated with clinical training level, social media use, and digital exposure. Given the central role of confidentiality and professional boundaries in psychiatric practice, digital environments may increase vulnerability to ethical risk. These findings support the integration of structured, case-based digital ethics education into medical curricula to safeguard therapeutic relationships in mental health care. Clear institutional policies and consistent role modeling may further enhance ethical sensitivity and professional responsibility in digital contexts

Keywords: Digital medical ethics, online privacy awareness, social media