

International Chiropractors Association
Ethical Guidelines for Internet Usage in a Chiropractic
Health Care Setting

The *International Chiropractors Association* recognizes the growing usage of Internet technology in health care related decisions. This trend can benefit the consumer greatly through increased choices and awareness of health care options and expectations.

The chiropractic health care provider must assume a high level of responsibility for the dissemination and usage of this technology in patient and community communications. To assist in maintaining a high level of confidence in Chiropractic information and usage via the Internet, the ICA has adopted these “Ethical guidelines for Internet Usage in a Chiropractic Health Care Setting.”

For ease of understanding these guidelines have been broken down into two categories related to Internet technology usage. The first section deals with web sites and the second section discusses email usage in a chiropractic setting.

Web Sites:

Content Honesty and Truth

All health related information contained on a web site should be truthful, honest and not misleading. Every attempt should be made to verify the legitimacy of all health care content on web sites.

Site Identification and Ownership

All health related web sites should have clear identification as to the owner or sponsor of the site. Chiropractic sites should clearly identify chiropractic as the subject of the site. Sites should not neglect the doctor's, or the sponsor's identity, or the profession represented from the introductory pages of the site. Not site should give the appearance or mislead viewers to believe they are in another health care profession informational site.

Sponsorship and Funding

If funding or sponsorship is obtained for the web site from any other source than the site subject or owner, clear identification of the site funding or sponsorship should be made.

Content Clarity

All content should be clear and easy to understand. There should be a definitive and obvious difference to the viewer between articles or information of fact and editorials on health care subjects.

Dating or Postings

Information on web sites should be timely and dated when possible. Relevance to the viewer should be based on their ability to know the timeliness of content on any given area of a site.

Referencing and Sourcing

When possible references and sources should be given for all articles and information on health issues. These references and sources should be traceable when possible by the viewer. If available these references should be links to the actual sources of information.

Links

When links are provided, a clear summary indication of these links should be made available to the viewer. Links should be current and hold to the same ethical standard of the original site if being used as a reference for health information.

Ethical Advertising on Sites

If advertising is placed on a health care site such advertising should be clearly identifiable as advertising, and should be of a high ethical quality.

Tracking Technology Related to Confidentiality

Internet technology has the ability to gain information directly from viewers computers. Any such usage shall not include health information or any tracking of the health subjects requested by viewers. Such tracking would violate patient confidentiality.

Data Collection Disclosure

Any non-health related data collected from a health care site visitor shall not be sold or disseminated in any way without the express permission of the viewer. Full disclosure of all collections from site should be made before any information is retrieved from the viewer to a health care site.

Ethical E-commerce

Any and all e-commerce conducted on a health care site shall be of the same ethical standard and legal requirements expected from on-site transactions.

Compliance With Local Regulatory Agencies

All content should be held to the same standard legally required from an in-office encounter. No statement or claims should be made on a web site if those same statements of claims would be prohibited in the local jurisdiction in which the health care facility or primary business is operated.

Non-Interference With Doctor – Patient Relationship

Any information provided on a site should be designed to inform the public and support through increased consumer awareness, a truthful relationship between a patient and his/her existing health care provider. No unsubstantiated statements or misleading information should be intended to maliciously interfere with any such relationship.

Email Communications:

Confidentiality With Email Communications.

All email communications must protect in every way possible the confidentiality of the patient. Such protection should include the usage of only single emails to each. When numbers of patients are to be emailed all patients to be emailed must be sent copies only as a “blind copy” address. Consideration should also be given as to where the email may be received. Work emails may be screened by

companies and should not contain any health or sensitive information. Patients should be asked as to what type of information they can receive with confidentiality being preserved.

Content Honesty and Truth

All communications using email shall hold to the same honesty and truthful requirements of other forms of patient communications.

Clear Identification of Email Origin

All email should be clearly identified as to its origin. No stealth technology should be used for doctor - patient communications.

Content Clarity

All content of emails should be clear and easy to understand. There should be a definitive and obvious difference to the reader between information of fact and editorials on health care subjects.

List Removal Easy

Any patient or person should have the easy availability to be removed from a health care provider's list for all future mailings. Upon request for removal, the doctor or health care facility shall remove that person from all future emailings.

Clear Identification of Message vs. Advertising.

If advertising is included with the email message it should be obvious and clear to the viewer where the message or content differs from the advertisement.

Mechanism for Patient / Consumer Response.

All email messages should include an easy ability for the reader to reply or respond in some manner to the originator of the email message.

Adopted by ICA Board
Robert Braile, D.C., F.I.C.A.
Chairman of the Board ICA
Chairman, Information and Technology Committee
July 26, 2000