July post: Social Media use in Adolescents – Sexting (by Mandakini Sadhir, MD, FAAP)

13 yr. old female was seen for a routine follow up for anxiety and ADHD. On confidential interview, patient disclosed recent incident when she sent nude pictures to someone she had befriended online using fr.im app. She reported that she downloaded this app and started talking to someone. She reported that she did not disclose her address but informed the person about her school. She stated that person she was talking to pressured her to send nude pictures. Initially, she kept delaying the request but then sent her nude pictures. She stated that she never met this person. She reported that she has never been sexually active. Her mother found out about it when patient's sister found pictures on her phone. Mother informed police and investigation is ongoing. Mother reported that person promised lot of things to the patient in lieu of her nude picture.

You discussed with family on how social media has played an important role in how teens seek out, maintain and end relationships. Teens often use social media as an integral part of dating. They often show their romantic interest to others by friending on social media site and express their attraction by liking, commenting or otherwise interacting with that person. While teens use both text messaging and talking on the phone, texting is by far the dominant way teens communicate in romantic relationships. In addition to text messaging, teens have been engaging in sexting which refers to sending/receiving sexual images (nude photos) and sometimes sexual texts via cell phone. Both males and females engage in sexting although prevalence may vary based on national vs regional, urban vs rural settings. In a study, adolescents who engaged in sexting were more likely to engage in high risk behaviors.

You counseled patient on risks of sexting and its legal implications. You educated patient about appropriate social media use and how to be safe about it. You discussed tips such as to protect personal as well as family information using password for computer or phones; to stop and think before sending photo, message; keeping setting private, be kind to others, only connect with friends and not strangers and to inform trusted adults when someone posts hurtful messages or asks for nude pictures.

You discussed with mother on the importance of monitoring technology use.

Resources:

Cyberbullying Research Center: https://cyberbullying.org/sexting-laws

Center on Media and child health: http://cmch.tv/