

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING 3



By the American Hospital Association
and Society for Healthcare Strategy &
Market Development

Digital and Social Media Engagement

Recognizing the importance of social media is the first step in taking your hospital into the digital world. Understanding the value and the potential of this medium can help to leverage your community benefit programs and patient engagement in a way never possible before the advent of the Internet.

As you are reading this, a patient is searching the Internet for a hospital location, while another is writing a review about her experience. Another patient is posting about his visit to the hospital directly from his hospital bed, as a mother posts to a message board about her daughter's first trip to the emergency department. Even if your hospital is not actively using social media, it's a safe bet that your patients and employees are. Social networks, blogs, discussion forums and other social and digital media platforms have become a primary medium for communication between people and businesses. As the number of these outlets increases, so does the number of people using them via mobile device, tablet or home computer, as well as the expectation of instantly accessible information.

Hospitals are in a unique position to influence social interactions about health care. Many hospitals use social media to communicate with and provide assistance to patients and families within their communities. Providing an alternative mode of

communication can help to make a patient interaction more comfortable and less clinical. By publicizing local health programs, explaining hospital services and answering questions in ways that are easily accessible by mobile devices, digital media can help hospitals expand their point of care to a patient's own living room — a place oftentimes more comfortable for the patient. When used appropriately, social media platforms can be effective in advancing the mission of your hospital or health system.

MANY ADVANTAGES

Health care professionals are proud of their work, and many want to share that enthusiasm in a public manner. Commenting on social networks and posting pictures is a common practice of many hospital employees. Although it is important to educate staff members about HIPAA concerns and internal hospital policies regarding social media use, there is a major opportunity to leverage the collective strength of your workforce on digital platforms. Nurses, doctors, technicians, environmental services and all other hospital employees leave work on a daily basis knowing they helped someone in need.

Capturing those positive feelings and sharing them with a social community allows providers to put a human face on a clinical experience. Hospital employees provide a wealth

of information and expertise. Allowing for that information and knowledge to live beyond the four walls of the hospital enables a hospital to share and connect with the community better than ever.

PHYSICIANS AS ADVOCATES

Physicians in particular are a valuable asset in social media. Often, physician and patient interactions, especially in an emergency situation, are characterized as quick and cold. But when a physician is able to take the time to communicate and expose his or her personality in a digital setting, a patient and family will be able to make a stronger, more trustworthy connection with the doctor. Blogs like KevinMD.com help to give a face to physicians. Surgeons who explain procedures via YouTube or Vimeo put families at ease. Once guidelines and goals are communicated effectively, encouraging physicians and care providers to engage on social media can be a huge asset to your organization.

MAKING A CONNECTION

As more and more people look online for health information, a supportive community or even help in finding a doctor, it's important for hospitals to be engaged online to maximize the opportunities to make a connection. A recent study found that hospitals with strong social media presence also had high Hospital Consumer As-

assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems scores. Increasingly, digital media is a first stop for consumers of all ages tackling health issues. Finding your organization online and through social media channels can ease apprehension by showing the personal side of those providing patient care.

CREATING COMMUNITIES

One of the most recognizable opportunities presented by social media for hospitals is the ability to create communities among patients and community members. Social media leverages shared interests and history to bring people together in an online space, a place where, often, people feel more open to share and invite others into their lives. Quite naturally, a hospital stay can be a negative or disruptive experience for patients and their family members. Providing a community online where people can interact with both the hospital and others with similar experiences allows the hospital to connect with patients on a different level. It also can give patients the opportunity to control their interaction, something they may not feel during their experience at the hospital.

Building communities can be particularly helpful with disease management as it relates to population health. Providing a space where patients can come together with others who are experiencing similar situations creates a virtual community of like-minded people. It also helps patients to make a connection with the hospital by asking

questions and preparing themselves for the care interaction before entering the doors of the care setting.

FEEDBACK

Using social media allows hospitals to listen to and engage in conversations already happening online. While hospitals may not always engage in the conversations, the information gained from monitoring the interactions is invaluable. It also enables hospitals to start a conversation, bringing expertise and information to the community before a situation arises.

Some hospitals invite online members to join social media groups that focus on specific topics, such as diabetes, breast cancer or healthy living.

Leveraging active users can ensure that your online community stays active. This can attract other people to the conversation with the promise of real-time conversation and information. Other hospitals use engaged, online patients to create advisory boards that promote patient engagement workshops and other hospital-based community resources. Such practices allow you to test programs or services with a smaller group before presenting them to the general public, and can range from a Facebook poll about changing the cafeteria food to asking for local volunteers to help with your annual coat drive.

WHY ALLOW ACCESS?

Patient and employee access to social media sites within hospitals is still of-

ten limited. A 2013 survey found that social media was blocked for 59 percent of health care professionals working in hospitals. Often, hospitals worry about employee performance as well as privacy or security breaches related to liberal employee and patient use of social media. But an open network approach can eliminate that risk when clear social media policies are in place, so that hospitals don't miss out on the many benefits of social media. One way or another, hospitals have options as to how much control they can place on digital activity within the hospital walls. The biggest challenge of an open network is setting easy-to-use guidelines and appropriately training all employees to follow those guidelines. This requires ongoing education within all levels of the hospital from volunteers to clinicians, support staff to board members.

When an organization blocks social media at work, people still connect to their doctors on Facebook and employees still use Twitter accounts from home. By opening your network to allow this to happen freely, you are providing a gesture of good will and allowing yourself to be part of the conversation in a positive way. You also stand to gain a new audience that supports your organization, from voicing support for new initiatives to turning out for charity fun runs.

Avoiding social media brings its own risks, including:

Risk to patients. Hospitals can help to reduce the potential for harm by correcting misleading or inaccurate health information transmitted through social media, providing reliable information, educating, and guiding patients and the community to reputable sources of information.

Risk to brand. By not participating in social media, hospitals are missing an opportunity to grow their brand recognition and engage with a larger community. When hospitals do not monitor social networks, they are less likely to be aware of threats to their reputation. Without an established social media presence, organizations are in a weak position to counter in-

A Second Chance



Angry customers used to voice their concerns over the phone, but now they share their experiences publicly on Facebook or Twitter. While most of the posts are positive, any comments from unsatisfied visitors at Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs, Calif., are forwarded to a patient advocate who can research problems, reach out to the individual and continue the conversation offline, if appropriate. The public relations

department also is involved with social media and responds to posts directed at the facility. "Any time you can learn about a less-than-desirable experience at your facility and are able to respond, you have a great advantage. Social media gives you a second chance for service recovery with patients and their families that wasn't available in the past," says Carolyn Caldwell, president and CEO of Desert Regional.

correct assertions with relevant facts. In addition, patients increasingly consider which providers share information and are more transparent about their performance.

Risk in a crisis. Should a disaster strike, the community will look to your social media presence for updates and direction. There should be a clear plan and designated communicator to ensure that such moments reinforce with your community the hospital's ability to care in all circumstances. The key is appropriately managing your social media footprint, be it big or small, to provide a consistent voice articulated through your social media policies.

If you don't embrace social media use in your organization, you can count on one thing: employees, patients and your community will use it anyway.

ESTABLISHING POLICIES

All social media platforms are designed fundamentally to be shared with the public at large. As such, in whichever social media activities your hospital engages should be undertaken with the understanding that the public will see them and may engage in an online dialogue with you as a result. It is extremely important that all hospitals centralize social media messaging to ensure that not only is everyone following the same guidelines, but also supporting the mission of the organization. It must be clear internally that social media does not exist within a vacuum. Although social media programs can be started slowly by adopting only one platform (e.g., Twitter) at a time, all communications should be integrated within the framework of your hospital's communications and marketing strategies.

Organizations can increase employee engagement and reduce lost opportunities by fully embracing digital and mobile media opportunities. Allowing employee use of social media deputizes additional brand ambassadors to share an organization's values and mission. But there must be policies and training to help employees understand how to use so-

cial media effectively on behalf of an organization, as well as how to manage difficult situations that could arise.

The very nature of this medium can pose risk as it easily facilitates instantaneous engagement without allowing or requiring time for reflective thought. It carries the added burden that communications live forever on the Internet. Therefore, organizations should be clear about who is authorized to contribute as an official spokesman or spokeswoman for the organization and through which social media communications tool.

Authorized contributors, such as bloggers, need to be educated not just about HIPAA, but a host of other issues, including copyright law, conflict of interest, and restrictions on endorsement and medical advice, to ensure proper use of social media and minimize associated risks for the organization.

REPURPOSING CONTENT

A common misconception with social media is that it requires the creation of additional content. Any content that is being used for newsletters, information packets, marketing materials or other promotional items can be repurposed for digital media. Replicating your organization's mission statement and goals through a digital strategy is crucial to ensuring proper and effective adoption. The voice of the content should shift to be more conversational and casual, but many messages can stay the same. Many hospitals run effective marketing programs that could be adapted easily for social media. In addition, many hospitals are beginning to use video and digital media advertisements to promote services.

LEGAL MATTERS

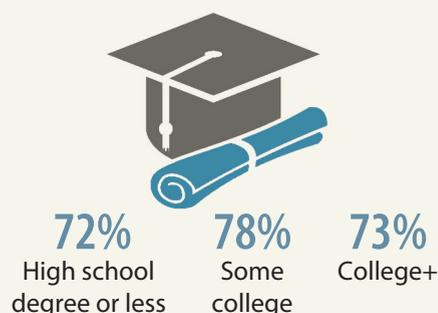
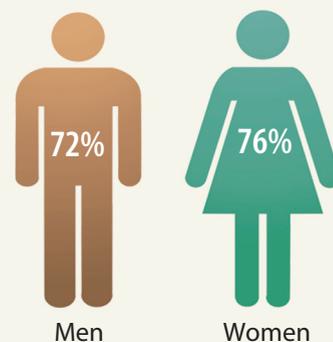
Although social media can be an effective tool for communications, hospitals must consider some legal issues that the use of social media can raise. These include policies outlining proper use of social media by your workforce, copyright and intellectual property, and restrictions on political engagement.

Who Uses Social Networking Sites?

Percentage of Internet users within each group who use social networking sites



All Internet users



Source: Social Networking Fact Sheet. Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, Dec. 27, 2013, online; April 13, 2015

HIPAA aims to protect an individual's privacy related to health information that can be used to identify a patient. While HIPAA doesn't speak directly to social media, without clear guidelines, hospitals can come across social media situations that may be difficult to manage from a compliance perspective.

HIPAA standards generally prohibit health care providers from publicly disclosing any patient information including that a patient received care from a particular provider — without the patient's authorization. State privacy laws can include more restrictions or limitations on the use and disclosure of patient information. The implications of the requirements for social media are vast. For example, if a patient comments negatively on a hospital's Facebook page and includes specific information about care received, a hospital cannot offer its version of that particular patient's course of treatment in response.

While HIPAA and other privacy laws and regulations may be viewed as counter to and inhibiting the open nature of social media communication, hospitals can incorporate patient privacy-related parameters within their social media policies to allow interaction with patients and facilitate successful online relationships. Once parameters are set, both staff and hospital administrators are responsible for enforcing these policies.

Education and awareness campaigns on what is and isn't allowed under HIPAA privacy laws, as well as a hospital's social media policy, should be part of the digital strategy.

NEGATIVE COMMENTS

Social media requires a thick skin. It is likely that negative conversations about your hospital are happening already. But negative comments can be viewed as constructive criticism. The important thing is that the hospital is listening and defining the parameters of when, and at what level, to engage with people who are making both positive and negative comments online.

All social campaigns aim to create

A Valuable Tool Come Crisis or Calm

Just months after New York Presbyterian began its social media program, Hurricane Sandy devastated New York, leaving power outages and travel restrictions in its wake.

Traditional methods of communication were limited and, for the first time, social media became a critical method of communication. Presbyterian used Facebook and Twitter to provide updates to the public and employees about what services were still available, locations of blood drives and a schedule for Presbyterian-chartered buses for employees. The team also used social media to share photos of employees working during the crisis.

Encouraged by the Presbyterian president's active involvement on Twitter throughout the recovery period, the number of employees who signed up for Twitter accounts grew and the role of social media as a viable, long-term communications strategy was solidified. Today, more than 500 employees are active on Twitter, including a large percentage of senior leaders who use the platform to connect with employees. Employees routinely share content with the social media team and, in one instance, a picture the president took of a new CT scanner and later posted on Twitter, went viral and earned nearly 50 million impressions.

a large base of supporters that spread the messages of an organization. Creating an online community of patients, caregivers, community members and others who have had positive experiences with your hospital (online or offline) and will step up to defend your hospital is the gold medal of social media development.

DEFINING SUCCESS

The first question for most when deciding to invest resources in social media is related to the potential return on investment — what's in it for you?

Return on investment, or ROI, doesn't have to translate into dollars. The first step to determine social media ROI is to ask what were the program's initial goals and what "success" looks like to you. If your hospital began using social media to connect with patients and provide reliable information, effectiveness should be determined by comparing results with your organization's strategic plan, objectives, goals and performance metrics. Are patients receiving reliable information from your social media channels? Have you built your audience of social media followers from your community? Have you successfully created a two-way dialogue with community members related to new services at your hospital? The answers to these questions often can be found

in the engagements reports for each social network. As many brand managers will tell you, positive comments and interactions related to your brand online often correlate to positive comments and interactions related to your brand offline.

There are a number of benefits related to the use of social media, the greatest being increased coordination and connection with patients. Social media allows hospitals to expand the point of care before, during and after a hospital visit. Managing that connection allows hospitals to answer patient questions in real time, something rarely possible within the normal framework of a care environment.

The biggest opportunity social media affords many hospitals is nurturing existing patient relationships and acquiring new connections. Building relationships online builds loyalty and trust. Providing constant access to both clinical and nonclinical information allows the 24-hour-a-day nature of the hospital environment to expand to a virtual environment. **T**

Excerpted, with permission, from "A Hospital Leadership Guide to Digital & Social Media Engagement," produced collaboratively by the American Hospital Association and the Society for Healthcare Strategy & Market Development.