



Social Media & Healthcare Providers

The objective of this blog was to develop a framework to assess the impact/influence of social media on the user(patients) for those healthcare providers who have invested in it. I am going to split this blog into pieces and the first part is going to build the foundation for the same.

The Common Definition for Social Media:

Social media is the creation and sharing of user-generated content. The content is nothing but unstructured data like dialogues (text), images, audio & video, etc. as a result of interaction and participation between individuals and/or groups.

There are eight pillars one needs to understand clearly in order to build a strong foundation. They are:

- **The Definition** - How does Healthcare define Social Media?
- **The source** - Social media sources for Healthcare
- **The Influencers** - Who or What can impact/influence the outcome?
- **Trends** - Where is the Healthcare industry headed with respect to Social media?
- **The Competition** - What is the competition/peers in the industry doing to capture the users attention in the social media space?
- **Monitoring** - How is Social Media monitored by

the Healthcare companies?

- **What can hospitals do** - with Social media
- **How to do** - How can hospitals accomplish / get into social media?

Before expanding on the above eight pillars, a few facts on why this topic is relevant today and needs to be viewed with a keen interest.

81% of all Cyberchondriacs have looked for health information online
 17% have gone online to look for health information 10 or more times
 86% were satisfied with their ability to find the information they want online
 85% believe the information they found is reliable

(SOURCE: The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive)

Moreover, social media has increased the awareness among users by letting them look up the internet for a variety of things like, facilities provided by a hospital, review about doctors, experience of other patients like themselves, comparison between treatment options given by doctors for the same disease, etc. This has put direct pressure on healthcare providers to not only excel in their services but also involve themselves in the social space.

Starting with the definition, the eight pillars have been expanded below from a Healthcare providers perspective.

The Definition:

This is how Healthcare defines social media, "People trust 'a person like me' more than authority figures from business, government and media", "Seeking ongoing dialogue, not one-way advertisement" and "Trust, transparency, openness, honesty".

The Sources:

The social media sources for Healthcare not in any particular order.

- **Blogs** - DiabetesMine, HealthMatters, WebMD, NYT HealthBlog
- **Social Networking** - OrganizedWisdom, PatientsLikeMe, DailyStrength, NursesRecommendDoctors
- **Microblogs** - Livestrong, Stupid Cancer
- **Podcasts** - Johns Hopkins Medical Podcasts, Mayo Clinic
- **Forums** - Revolution Health Groups, Google Health Groups
- **Social Sharing** - Flickr, YouTube, ICYou
- **Online events/campaigns**

The sources mentioned above do not include sources like newspaper/journal advertisements, patient education, etc. Only the online media has been considered.

The Influencers:

The key influencers in this industry have been identified as: Doctors, Patients, Patients relatives & friends, Hospital staff, Insurance agencies, Awards and Care givers.

Though these look pretty obvious, it is the word-of-

mouth comments & reviews left by these people on the internet that has impacted the hospital most. A simple example, an eye care hospital (name cannot be disclosed) in India started off very well till a time came when a series of mistakes were made by their doctors due to negligence. Today, the patients do not even want to check if the doctors have changed or not. It will take another round of influencers to now change this outlook about the hospital.

Trends:

When we say trends, its more around understanding what the leaders and emerging healthcare providers are doing in the social media space to influence and gain the visibility among the internet savvy public. Some of the interesting trends observed are below:

- **Information sharing** - Doctors come together to share research, exchange observations, and support one another
- **Engaging e-patients** - Connecting patients with similar disease processes, ailments, or conditions
- **Rating** - Of doctors, hospitals, service providers, etc. online
- **Targeted search** - Connect with patients and potential patients
- **Managing a conversation** - Q&A with surgeons
- **Convergence with personal health records** - Reminders to buy prescription medicines, Online personal health diary
- **Location-based social media "check ins"** - Inova Health System offers flu shot deals



The Competition:

The first mover advantage... and a big hit! It's all about thinking differently and that idea clicking with the public. Few instances where such innovative/unique thinking resulted in positive visibility for the healthcare provider:

- Broadcast **Emergency Room (ER) wait times** every few hours across their Twitter feeds
- Seattle's Swedish Medical Center, along with Mayo Clinic drew attention for hosting the first-ever "**Sleep up.**" The event, consisted of an all-night live stream following a patient undergoing sleep disorder testing and a Twitter Q&A session with physician sleep specialists, drew 10,000 visitors
- **Live-tweet surgeries** - Personally this is my favorite
- Interactive fitness program called "**Fitfor50**" that incorporates video, Facebook, Twitter and user stories
- Disaster **alerting and response**
- **Social media chats**
- Daily **health tips**

Some of this have become common and no longer a differentiating factor. Example, health tips and social media chats. Users expect this by default though social media penetration by healthcare providers is still in the nascent stage.

Monitoring:

Currently there seems to be a mix of in-house and outsourced social media monitoring and analysis.

The major downside seems to be setting up the platform for the users to interact and abandoning it. Here abandon means the lack of constant monitoring. When a patient posts a question in a Q&A platform setup by the provider, he/she expects a reply. When that does not happen, negative influence creeps in spoiling the reputation of the healthcare provider.

Buzz vs. Prevalence analysis on datasets is one of the commonly found monitoring mechanism in the healthcare industry.

What can hospitals do with Social Media:

Few of the benefits healthcare providers can reap by getting involved in Social media are below:

- Help progress medical research when physicians start to interact more often with more social information available in hand
- Publish health news first (alerts, awareness, crisis communication, health hazard information, etc.)
- Monitor hospital reputation
- Introduce new products and service lines
- Strengthen patient provider relationships
- Bring patients with similar problems together
- Physician opinion sharing
- Enable better marketing and communications efforts



How can healthcare providers do this?

In simpler terms, where can they start? Based on my analysis, some of the key pointers have been captured below:

- Dedicated team to monitor social activity
- Integrate marketing activities with social network
- Tools to monitor social activity
- Encourage physician to interact in social forums
- Dedicated team to check and respond to users grievances online
- Setup dashboards for executive team with metrics for social media monitoring.

About the Author

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