

**Social Media and Healthcare:  
Trends, Concerns and Best Practices**  
Nicole D. Galli, Esquire  
PBI Facebook, Blogging and Twitter . . . Oh My Space!  
Philadelphia, PA, September 22, 2011

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**Social Media and Health Care**

- According to a 2009 Pew Internet Research study, 61% of adults look online for healthcare information, while only 25% did so in 2000
- Another study has reported that 90% of the individuals already online search the internet for health information
  - Nearly 40% use social media for health information
- A recent Harris Interactive poll found similar results:
  - 69% of respondents used search engines
  - 62% of respondents used medical websites
  - 55% of respondents discussed health information found online with their physicians

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**Social Media and Health Care**

- According to Found in Cache ([www.ebennet.org](http://www.ebennet.org)), as of June 2011, approximately 1,188 US hospitals were active on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube
  - There has been a sharp and consistent rise in social media use by hospitals in the last three years
- Physicians are also increasingly using the internet for professional purposes
- Other healthcare industry participants also use social media – including the government, public health organizations, health insurers and clinical researchers

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### Social Media and Health Care

- Why are health care providers using social media?
  - Attract new patients
  - Improve experience of existing patients
  - Increase awareness about services
  - Communicate more reliable online health information
  - Promote health and health care
  - Enhance brand loyalty
  - Fundraising

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### Social Media: Potential Pitfalls?

- What are the potential pitfalls?
  - Privacy concerns, including HIPPA compliance, are among the top concerns for health care providers
    - These concerns are not academic – providers have been fired and disciplined for such conduct
    - Training is essential to sensitize providers to the ways in which HIPPA issues can arise on social media that may not be intuitive or immediately obvious to the provider
    - Policies are also important, including with regard to monitoring and responding to issues as they arise

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### Social Media: Potential Pitfalls?

- Health care providers also need to be careful to use these new mediums only to provide general medical information as opposed to specific medical advice
  - A related concern is that online interactions can be seen as establishing a patient-provider relationship
    - Policies and, especially, training are again key
    - Disclaimers should also be used – e.g., information provided is intended to provide general medical information and not a substitute for medical advice from a physician or other healthcare provider
    - Check malpractice coverage nonetheless

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### Social Media: Potential Pitfalls?

- Health care providers need to keep the personal/professional boundaries clear, even online
  - This is an area of significant concern to medical societies such as the AMA
    - Concern is heightened about students and/or young members of the medical field
  - This is a question of overall professional demeanor and conduct, as well as issues such as whether a provider should be “friends” with a patient or his/her family
  - Policies and training are key to addressing these concerns

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### Social Media: Course of Action?

- So how does a health care provider address the issues?
  - Set policies – for use at work and at home, if engaging on behalf of the organization or not, third party comment policies, etc.
    - Consider forming a social media committee or task force to develop the policies
  - Such groups should include personnel from all interested departments – e.g., at least, legal, compliance, risk, HR, communications, marketing; may also include medical personnel and even patients

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### Social Media: Course of Action?

- So how does a health care provider address the issues?
  - Institute training
    - Include refreshers on basic issues such as HIPAA, as well as issues unique to social media
    - Train all employees, including physicians
    - Managers, HR personnel and persons responsible for monitoring the organization’s social media outlets need additional training

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### Social Media: Course of Action?

- So how does a health care provider address the issues?
  - Use disclaimers – by the organization; and recommend use of disclaimers by the individuals as well
  - Engage in monitoring and have clear guidelines for it
  - Address violations – but must be consistent and respond only when and how appropriate
  - Brainstorm and plan for crisis response
  - When new issues/ideas arise - consult with legal counsel

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### Online Resources

- Medical association guidelines – e.g., AMA, MA Medical Society, Ohio State Medical Association
- Mayo Clinic Center for Social Media (<http://socialmedia.mayoclinic.org/>) – health care leader in social media; in house lawyer has blog on legal issues
- Found in Cache ([www.ebennet.org](http://www.ebennet.org)) – social media resource for healthcare professionals; includes links to social media policies from numerous healthcare providers
- U.S. Airforce – frequently relied upon as a model, especially for its monitoring/response protocol

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**Thank you!**  
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