

LETTER TO EDITOR

Social networking for healthcare professionals

Sir,

Social networks have become very popular over the years. Not only for informal social contact by teenagers but also more and more agencies from different walks are trying to tap its potential for something meaningful and healthcare is one such sector. The use of social systems benefits the patient through enhanced advocacy, access to information, and the ability to interact meaningfully with others having similar conditions. For medical professionals, social media and networking enable stronger peer interaction, closer ties to patients and their care, and the opportunity to publicly share their skills and experience. Healthcare corporations can leverage social media to inform both patients and providers of the latest offerings and best practices, although there is also a significant potential for misinformation and thought shaping that should be watched closely.^[1]

Medical professionals who embrace healthcare social media users are likely to forge deeper connections with their patients, resulting in greater patient loyalty and client retention as well as increased referrals. They can also connect with potential new patients when they share insight on medical news, research developments, and new treatments within the public forum. Following are some of the popular social network sites for doctors.

TWITTER

Medical professionals can use Twitter to educate their current patient base and reach out to new clients. Tweet about new developments in the healthcare industry, exciting news around the office, and success stories.

FACEBOOK

Doctors can keep their personal Facebook pages private and create a company or local business page instead. Doctors can either “friend” their patients or ask them to become their “fans.” This way doctors can advertise their business and set up new practice also.

GOOGLE+

Medical professionals can use Google+ for virtual patient support groups and educational offerings. The “hangout” feature enables up to 10 individuals to interact via live streaming video. While still fairly new, this could prove to be a very convenient way for doctors, nurses, and medical educators to interact with patients who do not need to be seen in the office.

LINKEDIN

Joining healthcare groups on this professional networking site can be a valuable way for medical professionals to connect, share ideas, and find information. LinkedIn today, a news service,

allows you to subscribe to news in your field and customize your news feed to the topics that are most relevant to you.

PINTEREST

Perhaps the newest of the social media sites that may have uses within the healthcare industry, Pinterest recently reached 10 million subscribers. Users create boards on which they “pin” images they have uploaded or found elsewhere on the web.

DOC2DOC

This site contains a free online doctor’s community that holds a range of tools for doctors to network with other doctors on a professional and social level. Create a forum, build your own community within this community based upon your own interests or workplace, and find and connect with new or old colleagues around the world. This network is powered by the BMJ Group.

DOC CHECK FACES

This private social network site operates on the premise that “in every white coat you’ll find a human being.” This network is free to use and exclusive for medical professionals (meaning, doctors only). Register, build a profile, and find contacts or invite colleagues.

DOCTOR NETWORKING

Discuss medical topics, ask and answer medical questions, post and find medical jobs, and network in privacy with this physicians-only site. DoctorNetworking is able to offer physicians free membership, free of pharmaceutical promotion, and free from the fear that their personal information will be sold.

DOCTOR'S HANGOUT

This is a personal and professional networking site geared toward doctors and med students worldwide. Doctors can exchange clinical experiences, review their cases, and share clinical knowledge in privacy in a site that holds features such as reviews, customized profile page, photo and video uploads, and more.

HEALTHEVA

This network is geared toward physicians, researchers, residents, interns, and medical students. Once registered, you can join a private community interested in basic science research, clinical research, paper collaboration, and startup and commercialization opportunities.

OZMOSIS

This is the network where “good doctors go to become great doctors.” Register to build a network or to learn from peers in ask and answer portals, a section for clinical cases and from the journal club, where professionals discuss journal articles and more. Ozmosis is another network for “verified US physicians”

only. Although it seems to have many similar features to Sermo, it does not seem to be as large or established as Sermo. Ozmosis was co-founded by an MD, and the site is touted as the most “trusted physician network,” and one designed exclusively “by physicians, for physicians.”

RELAXDOC

This site offers a free online resource for physicians, created by physicians. Exchange views about personal and professional issues, discuss cases, drugs or course treatments, share ideas for management, and more along with access to a full Medline database, medical journals, professional resources, and educational exclusives.

SERMO

Sermo claims to be the largest online physician community in the USA, with over 115,000 community members. This is where physicians come to collaborate on difficult cases and to exchange observations about drugs, devices, and clinical issues.^[2,3]

Sermo allows physicians to explore job opportunities, share clinical information and do case studies, and earn honoraria while having their voices heard. Sermo’s site states that it has 112,000 physician members across 68 specialties.

Sermo is exclusive to physicians and the site does require that you submit professional and personal identifying information in order to confirm that you are in fact a physician when you sign up to join the network. According to the Sermo site, features include interacting with drug experts, participating in forums with members of Congress, and numerous other opportunities to get involved, learn, share, and earn money.

STUDENT DOCTOR NETWORK

No matter your specialty, this site can help you focus on your major or on networking with other students in your field. Enjoy forums, blogs, wikis, and a bookstore that can help you ace your med studies. Med students also can use some doctor networking sites listed here.

TIROMED

This is a free networking resource portal for physicians and med students to use for networking, information sharing, and building community. This site was founded by a group of practicing physicians.

MEDXCENTRAL

MedXCentral is another community that is open to medical professionals of any type or role. Whether you are on the clinical side or the industry side of healthcare, you can connect with others on MedXCentral. Like Medical Mingle, MedXCentral also has a Facebook page where you can get additional updates right to your Facebook account. MedXCentral has groups which are subsets of the larger community you can join based on your role or subspecialty within the healthcare field. MedXCentral

works in conjunction with Twitter, YouTube, etc., Jim Canto, who started the network, regularly posts news and informational updates about the medical industry that you can receive on the site or via the Facebook community. His goal is to “become a centrifuge for all things related to the medical and health care industry on the web.”

MedXCentral also has a free staffing exchange called “Medical Professional Online Profile Service.”

MEDICAL MINGLE

It is a website created by the owners of absolutely health care, a medical job board. Medical Mingle is a free professional social network for people interested in, working in, servicing, or studying for a career in the medical or health care field. Medical Mingle offers blogging, job postings, and career resources.

Social network sites are also available according to specialties of doctors.

SPECIALITIES

BioCrowd

If you are a student, scientist, business person, or other healthcare professional with a passion for bioscience, you may want to join this network to build relationships, share ideas, find jobs, and identify new career opportunities.

DermRounds

This networking site was created by dermatologists for dermatologists, residents, fellows, other physicians, health professionals, industry leaders, and anyone else who is connected with the field of dermatology.

OBGYN.net

Join this group to share knowledge and gain information from over one million pages filled with educational content, discussion forums, videos, educational tutorials, and images. The goal of this network is to continuously improve services in the field of women’s healthcare.

Present Diabetes

Built by present eLearning systems, this networking site provides researchers and caregivers with a collaborative community with the singular goal of fighting the diabetes epidemic.

Present Podiatry

This site also is managed by present eLearning systems, and it focuses on community built around healthcare professionals who focus on foot care. Gain access to cutting edge CME lectures, focus groups, blogs, instant messaging, chat, and other forms of professional networking at this networking site.

SurgyTec

This community offers surgeons a place to share case reports, receive 2nd opinions, learn about events and news, and connect with other surgeons. SurgyTec is based in The Netherlands, but operates globally with a large community of the best medical practitioners and academic peers.

Syndicom spine connect

With a growing case knowledge base of over 1,300 cases and 5,000 reviews, spine connect is the place where spine surgeons look for insights into complicated cases, information on new technologies, and as a venue for conducting case-based research.

Within 3

This site offers a venue for clinicians, physicians, nurses, and more to create environments for collaboration, clinical trials, and professional networks.^[2-4]

Nursing staff provides the most useful support to physicians. They too can make use of the social network sites. Following are some of the sites for them.

AllNurses.com

AllNurses.com seems like one of the largest, most active nursing networks (That statement is based primarily on the author's anecdotal evidence and observation, not on any hard numbers.) The site appears to be very active based on the number of threads and number of active readers at any given time (4,000 + online when visited last), which is posted on the home page so you can see how many people are actually logged in to the site when you are there. In addition, the site seems well organized and easily navigated due to clearly labeled tabs you can click on across the top, which was very helpful at a glance.

Nurse.com-nursing forum

Nurse.com offers another large, engaging nurse community online. The site offers over 12,000 job postings in addition to nursing-related news, forum discussions, and other networking opportunities to interact with thousands of other nurses of all levels and specialties. Like AllNurses.com, the Nurse.com site also provides easy navigational tabs for a better user experience than many other networking communities. Nurse.com: Registered users have full access to a site filled with discussions, polls, content, and other features. This site is sponsored by Gannett Healthcare Group, publisher of many nurse publications.^[4]

Mynurse book

This networking site for nurses focuses on the global nurse shortage and solutions to these crises. This site looks as though it is fairly new, so get in on the ground floor.

Nurse connect

Find friends and former nursing colleagues, network your way into a new nursing job, rate and review hospitals, and more with privacy at this nurses' networking site. NurseConnect is owned and operated by AMN Healthcare, Inc.

NurseLinkUP

Nurses can use this site to find jobs, to create a detailed profile, and to connect to other nurses. NurseLinkUP also maintains a Facebook page, so users can connect in two places. You must be registered to view all content. NursingLink: NursingLink brings nurses together to provide resources and services to advance careers and take advantage of everything a community site has to offer. News, education resources, job search, career networking, advice, and mentorship are just a few of those benefits.

Nurse together

This site is more than a network site, as it offers advice, education, forums, global nursing focuses, a store, and more.

Nurses, nursing students, and those considering a career in nursing can come together, communicate, and connect on the issues that matter to them at this site.

Nurse zone

This online community is dedicated to providing nurses with professional and personal development information and opportunities. Users can find a wealth of helpful content and engage in forums, blogs, and with sharing personal stories and experiences. The site appears to be very active based on the number of threads and number of active readers at any given time (4,000 + online when visited last), which is posted on the home page so you can see how many people are actually logged in to the site when you are there. In addition, the site seems well organized and easily navigated due to clearly labeled tabs you can click on across the top, which was very helpful at a glance. AllNurses: This site has all information for nurses, including forums, articles, blogs, and news.

Student nurse journey

This is a place for students to come together to share their knowledge, thoughts, ideas, stories, and most of all, to support one another as future nurses.^[4-6]

Student nurse network

This is a new Ning social networking site that was built by nursing students for other nursing students. One can create a page, engage in forums, and share photos.

There are certain points health professionals keep in mind while using these social network sites. First, doctors should be able to identify their target audience who are likely to become their patients after connecting with them. Second, social networking site should maintain a professional image and communicate expertise and a particular brand. Always be sure to use your social networking tools to communicate relevant, useful, and accurate information to your connections. One of the very unique and valuable features of using social networking sites as a medical practice marketing vehicle is that you can seek feedback from your connections cater to their needs and improve your services.^[7]

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