



5 Keys to Social Media for Healthcare Professionals (And Everybody Else, Too)

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Patients are talking 24/7 on the web. Healthcare practitioners - doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, researchers - need to join the conversation, to offer their knowledge and clarity to the discussion. Here are what we see as the 5 key steps that healthcare professionals need to take to successfully engage with their communities online:

1. *Know what you want to accomplish*

Are you looking to educate your community about a specific health issue, or are you seeking to raise your practice or facility's profile? Both? The key here is to build a focused strategy. Identify the most valuable knowledge you have, and develop a 90-day messaging plan around sharing that knowledge.

2. *Use a clear voice*

If you're a practitioner planning on being the face and voice of your own message, build your social media presence using your image and your conversational voice. If you're planning on getting your staff involved, create your message plan with staff input - and make it clear on the social media sites you use that it's a team effort.

3. *Look for shining examples*

Who are the leaders in your specialty? Are they using social media? You can learn a lot from someone else's success story: what social media sites they use, what kind of information they share, how often they post, how they get their team involved.

4. *Plan the time*

Using social media is a commitment. Once you've determined what social media platforms you want to participate in - Twitter, Facebook, Ning, blogging, podcasting, YouTube - you've got to put it on your schedule. You don't have to be everywhere, but once you do select a platform, you need to continue to offer content to the conversation.

5. *Listen twice as much as you talk*

When you share something on social media, you're starting a conversation. Not listening is like calling someone, saying "hello," and then hanging up before they can respond. Part of the time commitment of social media is listening. There are tools you can use to facilitate that, and to help you monitor the topics you're interested in. HootSuite (<http://hootsuite.com>) is a powerful web-based tool to monitor and engage across all the most popular social media sites. TweetDeck (<http://tweetdeck.com>) is another popular social media management tool (it requires the installation of Adobe AIR).

There are over 500,000,000 people using Facebook, of which over 125,000,000 are in the US. How many of your patients are on Facebook? On Twitter? They might be talking about you already - are you listening?

Casey Quinlan is the social-media practice lead at WellCentrix. If you'd like some help building a social media presence for your practice or facility, contact us!