

Does Twitter Have a Place in Health Care Practices?

How can health care professionals effectively use Twitter?

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Twitter, the popular and ever-growing microblogging platform format famous for its 140-word character limit, is seemingly ubiquitous these days. Celebrities' accounts amass millions of followers. Commercials and televised sporting events suggest *hashtag* words to use when tweeting about their products or events. Even the White House maintains an active Twitter account, but how is Twitter appropriate for physicians and other health care professionals?

STAY INFORMED

Twitter is an excellent source for gathering the latest news and developments on any topic you find relevant and interesting. In addition to following large news outlets on Twitter, find others in your field who are informed and active on Twitter. If you need a starting point, websites such as twitterdoctors.net curates a regularly updated list of the most influential doctors on Twitter.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON RELEVANT HEALTH NEWS

News related to the health care industry is an always-evolving hot topic. Twitter is the perfect platform for you to weigh in with your thoughts on these trending issues. Whether you are sharing information with the general public or exchanging thoughts and opinions with



A screen shot of Dr. Silverman's Twitter page. You can position yourself as an informed expert by sharing information with your followers.

colleagues in your field, Twitter allows you to position yourself as an informed expert by sharing information. In this manner, you can also stay abreast of breaking news and learn from others' shared perspectives.

PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS

As with other social media sites, Twitter— if used correctly—can be effective at promoting your practice or office. Tweet about upcoming events or specials, offer Twitter-only discounts, or use the microblogging service to promote your website or blog.

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CRISIS RESPONSE

During times of a health-related crisis, whether due to a sudden emergency such as a natural disaster or a more slowly developing one like a flu pandemic, people turn to the experts for help. You can leverage social media outlets like Twitter to provide up-to-the-minute information on developments, resources with which consumers can inform and protect themselves such as health care providers' locations and hospital statuses, and updates for those following the situation from afar.

GENERAL TIPS

A key component of a successful social media account is content that users find valuable. Using Twitter to share general health tips and news related to your specialty is a great way to provide helpful information, establish your-

self as an expert in your field with a broad online audience, and cultivate a following of interested, attentive followers.

WHAT TO AVOID

While general health and wellness tips are encouraged, Twitter should never be used to dispense medical advice. It should also go without saying that great care must be taken in protecting your patients' privacy. Even in 140-character blurbs, it is possible to share too much and identify patients, even inadvertently. You must also keep in mind that, unlike direct messages, Twitter replies and retweets are publicly viewable and searchable. ■

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