CONVERSATIONS USING COMMUNICATIONS: IMPROVING PATIENT INTERACTIONS USING TECHNOLOGY

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Communication in a healthcare is one of the most important tool for providing greater service delivery and patient care. The role of digital communication in contemporary mobilization of services and generating access is crucial. In recent years the medical profession has become aware of the opportunities that social media and social networking websites present.

Digital mechanisms ease sharing and co-production of health knowledge via offering different routes to the patients. Information technology is important to improve population health outcomes and health care quality, and to achieve health equity. Health communication and health information technology are central to health care, public health, and the way our society views health. It helps the general public search for, understand, and use health information, significantly impacting their health decisions and actions.

All people have some ability to manage their health and the health of those they care for. However, with the increasing complexity of health information and health care settings, most people need additional information, skills, and supportive relationships to meet their health needs. Disparities in access to health information, services, and technology can result in lower usage rates of preventive services, less knowledge of chronic disease management, higher rates of hospitalization, and poorer reported health status. Both public and private institutions are increasingly using the Internet and other technologies to streamline the delivery of health information and services. This results in an even greater need for health professionals to develop additional skills in the understanding and use of consumer health information.

Organizationally enabled connective action can help to build personal narratives that strengthen patient communities, the bottom-up production of health knowledge relevant to a wider public, and the development of an informational and eventually cultural context that eases patients' political action (Cappai, 2016).

Importance of Health Communication Technology

Effective use of communication and technology by health care and public health professionals can bring improvements of patient- and public-centered health information and services. Not only do digital mechanisms ease sharing and co-production of health knowledge via offering different routes to engagement. By exploiting hyperlinking structures, they also ease online bridging among different social actors and bolster the development of health information pathways (Cappai, 2016).

Technologies that help people identify and overcome these information and communication obstacles can readily facilitate the beginnings of social behavior. Communication processes do not happen in a media vacuum; media ecologies certainly shape the dynamics and influence interaction processes among different institutional and non-institutional actors.

Strategically combining health IT tools and effective health communication processes, there is the potential to:
- Improve health care quality and safety.
- Increase the efficiency of health care and public health service delivery.
- Improve the public health information infrastructure.
- Support care in the community and at home.
- Facilitate clinical and consumer decision-making.
- Build health skills and knowledge.

The Role of Social Media

Social media generally refers to Internet-based tools that allow individuals and communities to gather and communicate; to share information, ideas, personal messages, images, and other content; and, in some cases, to collaborate with other users in real time (Ventola, 2014).

Social media sites provide a variety of features that serve different purposes for the individual user. They may include blogs, social networks, video- and photo-sharing sites, wikis, or a variety of other media, which can be grouped by purpose, serving functions such as:

- Social networking (Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, Twitter)
- Professional networking (LinkedIn)
- Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr)
- Content production (blogs [Tumblr, Blogger] and micro blogs [Twitter])
- Knowledge/information aggregation (Wikipedia)
- Virtual reality and gaming environments (Second Life)

Social media is a platform where the public, patients and healthcare professionals can communicate about health issues and possibly improve health outcomes. Patients often seek medical knowledge from social media platforms rather than traditional medical sources. Digital media eases one-way, two-way and crowd sourced process of health knowledge sharing; provides personalized routes to health-related public engagement; and creates new ways to access health information, particularly where patient experiences and medical advice are both equally valued (Cappai, 2016).

Social media opens up many opportunities for health systems. It allows organizations to build connections, share discoveries, and develop credibility as thought leaders. Social Media plays an important role in healthcare today as it has an impact on patient empowerment. Patients have untold information about their healthcare experiences at their fingertips and want pass it along to others who are in the same situation. To enable the patient voice, several health care organizations have developed tailored social platforms for targeted audiences.

Patient-powered platforms are creating innovative approaches to old problems by utilizing social media. Instead of finding a solution, they enable targeted audiences to explore other methods, learn from each other, and adapt to meet the specific needs of their environment. By engaging and interacting on social media sites, healthcare organizations can help revitalize the word of mouth referrals and eliminate barriers that were created by the lack of communication. Through social interactions, patients have the ability to develop a first impression of a hospital and physician before meeting them in person.

Who Uses Social Media?

Consumers, especially the younger generation, use social media to research and to make health decisions. These decisions include the selection of their doctor, hospitals and even courses of treatment for both themselves and their family, including their parents. These consumers are well-versed in social media and expect their providers to be equally proficient. (Belbey, 2015)

Patients, who are already active social media users, consider themselves part of a tribe and tend to trust others on social media more than other sources. It only makes sense that they will use social media to connect with each other to share their experiences with both rare and common disease and health issues. (Belbey, 2015)

Physicians can use social media to network professionally with colleagues and peers and to share medical knowledge within the medical community. Some doctors also believe that the authenticity of social media can drive better quality of care.

Uses and Dangers of Social Media

Uses of Social Media	Dangers of Social Media
Professional Networking	Poor Quality information
Professional Education	Damage to Professional Image
Organizational Promotion	Breaches of Patient Privacy
Patient Care	Violation of the Patient-Health Care Professional Boundary
Patient Education	Lack of Governance
Public Health Programme	Other Legal Issues

Healthcare Professionals and Social Media

Social media provide healthcare professionals with tools to share information, to debate health care policy and practice issues, to promote health behaviors, to engage with the public, and to educate and interact with patients, caregivers, students, and colleagues. (Househ) Healthcare professionals can use social media to potentially improve health outcomes, develop a professional network, increase personal awareness of news and discoveries, motivate patients, and provide health information to the community.

Physicians most often join online communities where they can read news articles, listen to experts, research medical developments, consult colleagues regarding patient issues, and network. There they can share cases and ideas, discuss practice management challenges, make referrals, disseminate their research, market their practices, or engage in health advocacy. A growing minority of physicians also uses social media to communicate directly with patients to augment clinical care (Ventola, 2014).

Due to increased privacy laws and regulation, healthcare centric discussions need greater moderation than any other industry. This also extends to social media in terms of defining clear criteria/ guidelines for how much of content to share and in what form.

Benefits of Social Media

Below mentioned are the major advantages of using social media in Healthcare (Marouchos, 2015)
1. Increase interaction with others (Patient to Patient)
2. More available, shared and tailored information
3. Increased accessibility and widening access
4. Peer/social/emotional support
5. Public health surveillance
6. Potential to influence health policy

Emerging Issues in Health Communication and Health Information Technology

During the coming decade, the speed, scope, and scale of adoption of health IT is likely increase. Social media and emerging technologies promise to blur the line between expert and peer health information. A key concern with using social media in business has been the reliability of information. In heavily standardized and regulatory driven industries such as Healthcare, it becomes imperative to have well recognized/ accredited sources of information.

Monitoring and assessing the impact of these new media, including mobile health, on public health will be challenging. Equally challenging will be helping health professionals and the public adapt to the changes in health care quality and efficiency due to the creative use of health communication and health IT.

Continual feedback, productive interactions, and access to evidence on the effectiveness of treatments and interventions will likely transform the traditional patient-provider relationship. It will also change the way people receive, process, and evaluate health information.

Capturing the scope and impact of changes and the role of health communication and health IT in facilitating them will require multidisciplinary models and data systems. Such systems will be critical to expanding the collection of data to better understand the effects of health communication and health IT on population health outcomes, health care quality, and health disparities.

Conclusion

Social media is pervading businesses like never before. Employees use it and so do customers and prospects. It is shaping public opinion and eventually government policy. Healthcare organizations need to understand how the chatter in the social media universe can be harnessed meaningfully to grow business and visibility. While some organizations have taken the lead in this area, many others are struggling to understand this new medium of opportunity. Developing a social media policy is no longer an option today, it is a necessity. If healthcare organizations do not take efforts in this direction, they run the risk of becoming stagnant and perhaps obsolete in the long run.

People of all demographics are adopting these technologies whether on their computers or through mobile devices, and they are increasingly using these social media for health-related issues. Although social media have considerable potential as tools for health promotion and education, these media, like traditional health promotion media, require careful application and may not always achieve their desired outcomes.

There is a need for evaluating the effectiveness of various forms of social media and incorporating outcomes research and theory in the design of health promotion programs for social media.

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