

KevinMD answers doctors' top social media questions

APR 13, 2015

Staff News Writer

Are you a social media user? Get answers to your questions from one of medicine's top social media experts.

Kevin Pho, MD, founder and editor of KevinMD.com, answers physicians' questions about social media in the latest issue of *Physician Family*, the AMA Alliance magazine. Here are some of the highlights from Dr. Pho that can assist you in smartly using social media:

Why should doctors use social media?

Physicians should engage with social media for three reasons: Educate patients, define their online reputations, and make their perspectives and voices heard.

More patients than ever are going online to research their health condition, but the accuracy of the information they may find is questionable. Social media is a powerful way for physicians to guide patients to better health information or create their own health content. It's also a way to proactively define their online presence so they can control how patients perceive them on the Web. Finally, in this era of health reform, the voice of the practicing physician is often missing. Social media provides a visible platform for these doctors to be heard.

How should a doctor get started on social media?

Start with an incremental approach. First, spend a few hours creating profiles on professional social networks such as LinkedIn—then stop. At this point, ask yourself, "What are my goals for social media?" Is it educating patients, advocating for a cause or debating health reform?

As you become more comfortable with being online, you can incrementally adopt social media platforms that fit your goals, from curating links on Twitter to creating content on a blog or YouTube.

If you find that you just don't have the time, you can stop after creating your initial profile on LinkedIn.

Just that act alone is powerful—these sites get ranked high on Google searches and will be patients' first impressions of you online.

What should doctors avoid doing online?

Protecting patient privacy is key to protecting an online reputation. Discussing specific patients or cases would be a violation of patient privacy laws and could seriously damage your reputation.

Further, avoid “airing dirty laundry” from your practice. Anything posted on social media should be considered permanent and has the potential to spread to the public.

How should doctors respond to online reviews?

My first tip is to listen to criticism. When patients leave reviews online, it's the only way they have a voice.

Whenever you read criticism online, there's a strong temptation to respond to it immediately. You want to set the record straight—but hold off on that temptation because it's rare that an online argument is going to result in anything productive. Instead, here's my second tip: Take the conversation offline. Respond with a standard reply, thanking the patient for the comment and asking him or her to call your office. If you can resolve the dispute over the phone or in person, the patient may take down the negative review, or even add an addendum saying, “Hey, this office is listening to what I'm saying.” That can turn a negative situation into a more constructive one.

Ask more patients to rate you online. There are dozens of studies that have found the majority of online ratings are, in fact, positive and better than the majority of doctors would think. Asking more patients to rate you online will make rating sites more useful by populating them with more reviews, and they will dilute any negative ratings and make them look more like outliers.

Find more social media advice in *Physician Family* and get tips to manage your online reputation at *AMA Wire*®.

Need more help? Watch *AMA Wire* for more information on the Social Media Guru Bar to be featured at the 2015 AMA Annual Meeting June 6-10 in Chicago, where social media experts will be available to answer all of your questions, from basic to advanced.