

Social Media for the Health Care Organization: Sharing for Good

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Whether you like it or not, people are getting a lot of their health and medicine information from the Internet. Some sources of information, such as health care organizations, provide resources for individuals that can help support productive conversations with providers. Internet-obtained health materials can improve the patient-provider relationship if the patient discusses what they have obtained with the provider. This dialog can lead to more engaged health decision-making.¹

Many times, however, people seeking health information online are getting it from social media.² Research by GWI in 2016 showed that 97% of adults between ages 16 and 64 years say they logged into at least one social channel in the last month.³

The misinformation that runs rampant on social media has made headlines. During the current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Facebook has started including warnings and notices to users about the possibility that the information they are consuming could be incorrect. Users share information without citing sources, fact checking, or even reading the articles they “like” and share.⁴

This is exactly why health care organizations and health care professionals should be on social media. By sharing credible, high-quality health and medicine information, health care organizations can bring appropriate answers to the place where patients and families are looking.

This article describes the approach Nationwide Children's Hospital has employed to meet the growing need for high-quality health and medicine information on social media. These strategies and tactics are applicable to any health care organization or professional looking to expand their social media presence.

The Nationwide Children's Hospital Social Media Experience

Organizational social media accounts are an important tool for combating misinformation,² but that is not all. Hospital-owned channels support revenue-driven marketing campaigns, share stories to show organizational culture in support of recruitment and retention, and act as a platform to support customer service needs and respond to reviews and feedback.

In the case of negative comments posted online by a patient or employee, sometimes real-time conversations can prevent further damage to the hospital's reputation. Nationwide Children's Hospital patient relations team has stopped situations from escalating because they were alerted by a social media post. A parent who has grown tired of their wait time can be deescalated in the waiting room, for example, before further reputational harm occurs.

Individual clinicians can also make an impact on social media²; think of them as organizational thought leaders. If an individual clinician's social media work is supported through education and training opportunities, they can help share accurate and relevant information. Twitter, especially, is a place to connect with peers to share research content, amplify speaking engagements, and connect with referring physicians or consumers. In 2020, social media played a large role in attracting candidates who could not tour facilities in person—a trend Nationwide Children's Hospital social media team expects to continue past the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most importantly, by disseminating evidence-based information, health care organizations or individuals who use social media are in a position to actively combat state-

ments that can, at best, be erroneous and, at worst, be a hazard to public health.

Meeting Your Audience Where They Are

When you research the origin of social media,⁵ it is easy to see that online communities are rooted in discussion forums. Although archaic by today's standards, in the early 1990s, people flocked to these digital spaces to connect with like-minded individuals with similar backgrounds. Originally filled with gamers and technologists, forums grew to include bloggers and users with varied interests, whether they were crafters, engineers, or people with medical needs.

Forums and blogs allowed health care consumers to find information on everything from navigating therapies to choosing a doctor. Patients and their families came looking for resources, and along the way, they found reviews that guided decision-making and communities that offered moral support. Now, clinicians can be part of the conversation.

Tools for Success

The first step to success in social media is to analyze goals. Are you looking for referrals? Are you managing reputation and reviews? Are you looking to drive recruitment? Maybe it is a little of all three. Setting goals will help determine which platforms best suit needs and help guide decisions regarding time dedication, staff allocation, and whether additional online tools are needed.

Once goals are set, it is important to educate yourself or your team on best practices in social media. Just as someone would not perform surgery without a proper education, they should not tweet without one either. Improper social media use is a reputational risk. At Nationwide Children's Hospital, a complete-workforce curriculum trains staff about social media for personal and professional use based on 4 pillars: advocacy, professionalism, awareness, and compliance.

Navigating the Platforms: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and TikTok, Oh My!

Messages should be tailored not only to an audience but also a platform. Dancing doctors can share vaccine efficacy on TikTok, but there is not an audience for

that type of performance on LinkedIn. Research studies have a place on Twitter, but they are less likely to get traction with a consumer audience on Facebook. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

At Nationwide Children's Hospital, messaging and audience are tailored to each platform. The Nationwide Children's Hospital Facebook channel supports broad messaging for the consumer audience. Human Resources has a channel devoted to sharing job postings and content that shares and highlights organizational culture. The Nationwide Children's Hospital Foundation has a channel to share fundraising events and patient stories. Some departments also use Facebook for parent-focused messaging. In some cases, they host private Facebook groups where parents and providers can interact and find support for complex or chronic conditions.

On Instagram, the organizational channel shares content to illustrate the hospital's mission. Images of patient care, child-life initiatives, and diverse staff reinforce a commitment to advocacy for children and families and show how the hospital provides services to accommodate their needs. Visual storytelling makes a culture of inclusion come to life.

On Twitter, Nationwide Children's Hospital takes advantage of multiple audience-specific accounts to maximize audience engagement. The main hospital account focuses on communicating broad hospital messages and sharing parent-focused content. The hospital also supports Twitter accounts for Human Resources and Trainees as well as others for specific departments and programs.

Table 1. Audience Types Typically Found on Different Social Media Platforms

Audience	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Pinterest	TikTok
Consumers	X	X	X		X	X
Health Care Professionals	X	X	X	X		
Donors	X	X		X		X
Staff	X	X		X		X

Table 2. Preferred Type of Messages for Different Social Media Platforms

Message	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Pinterest	TikTok
Blog Post	X		X		X	
Statistics	X	X	X	X		X
Job Posting	X	X	X	X		X
Donor News	X	X		X		

The physician/researcher-focused account shares research summaries, new publications, and research-related videos and engages with the audience through topic-specific Twitter chats. The Twitter chats enable Nationwide Children's Hospital faculty to use their personally maintained professional accounts to share expertise, engage with experts and trainees around the world, and be amplified by the organization's accounts.

LinkedIn serves as a recruitment tool where users find job listings and hospital news. The channel can also be used for retention by sharing awards and acknowledgements of current staff or as a place to house long-form posts from hospital administration on strategic initiatives.

Do you have a registered dietitian with a delicious recipe to share? Or a physical therapist who can illustrate kettle bell exercises? Pinterest is where consumers can peruse wellness and prevention content and is ideal for blog posts or Web content with a visual element.

And finally, TikTok. Hospitals may shy away from this new kid on the block, but TikTok can get evidence-based content into the hands of a new audience. This unique platform can be utilized by doctors who share prevention information or want to bust myths around everything from vaccines to food allergies.

Although content can be cross-promoted among organizational accounts, not all content should be. However, too many organizational accounts can dilute the overall brand and add to governance responsibilities. Striking a balance can be hard, and in the case of a hospital, once one service line or lab gets an account, they may all want one. It is important for the Social Media or Communication department to have an account approval and governance process in place before getting started.

The Content Connection: Social Drives Pageviews

Great content is only useful if people see it. Sharing content on targeted and curated social media channels helps to ensure that the target audience is seeing what has been produced.

For example, *Pediatrics Nationwide* is a researcher and physician-focused online magazine. Although getting articles from the site to show up in searches (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.) is great, it is difficult to determine who is finding and reading it. Is the content reaching the intended audience? By sharing *Pediatrics Nationwide* content via the researcher and physician-focused social media channels, the channels serve

targeted content to our targeted audience—increasing the likelihood that they will read it.

On the flip side, that great statistic that is buried in your report or feature article can reach more people and have a greater impact when shared through appropriate social media channels.

Collaboration for Better Communication

When subject matter experts work together, the product is always greater than the sum of its parts. At Nationwide Children's Hospital, having medical writing experts, social media experts, researchers, and health care professionals working together has enabled us to develop a network of social media channels that support and benefit from our content channels: blogs, podcasts, research articles, and more.

For health care organizations and professionals interested in expanding their social media presence, developing a similar network of experts would serve them well. In addition, the strategies and tactics outlined in this article (understanding goals, identifying audiences and channels, and educating organizational social media users) provide a place to start your social media journey. While you are considering your organizational goals, don't forget the important responsibility of health care organizations on social media: dispelling myths and providing high-quality health information.

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