

Communities of Practice—HIM's Social Network

Save to myBoK

by **Vera Rulon** , MS, RHIT, CCS

Social media has boomed with the advent of online networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn. Now healthcare is getting involved, too.

One can only imagine the impact the new ways of patient-doctor, consumer-consumer, and doctor-doctor communications will have on healthcare.

Blogs, Networks Enhance Healthcare

Patients and physicians now increasingly communicate via e-mail. Although not as personal as a face-to-face office or home visit, remote communication and monitoring is becoming popular. A study measuring the effectiveness of e-mail between patients and physicians found that both physician and patient satisfaction increased with the convenience of e-mail.¹

But new communication forms like blogs and networking sites are expanding communication far beyond patient-doctor exchanges. They are allowing consumers to discuss with each other their particular ailments and what treatments have and have not worked for them.

These sites allow patients to network, reducing feelings of loneliness. Caregivers can also get involved to get help and answers to questions when needed to ensure the best possible care for their loved ones.

The site grouploop.org connects teenagers with cancer in a private and safe environment. The teens join a community of others like them who can help them get through the more difficult times.

Physicians can join a networking site called Sermo that offers them a professional forum where they can discuss cases and share clinical insights. In some ways, this replaces the conversations between physicians in their local settings, and it expands their reach for varied opinions and expertise.

Sermo also conducts surveys. I had the opportunity to hear Daniel Palestrant, MD, the founder and president of Sermo, speak several months ago. As we listened, a survey was posted on the site and within a few minutes almost 200 physicians had responded. How is that for real-time opinion gathering?

Connecting through CoPs

AHIMA members have their own social networking tool: the Communities of Practice. We are a community of professionals who, like patients who gain insights to their diseases and physicians who discuss medical issues, can share our challenges and expertise through this virtual network.

In the coming year AHIMA will be improving the CoPs. New features will boost our ability to communicate, solve problems, and get to know each other. A sleek new design will incorporate social technologies such as blogs, wikis, and ratings, boosting opportunities for networking, sharing, and collaborating.

Technology makes the CoPs possible, but members are what truly bring value to them. We need our diverse membership to participate. I encourage all members to log on the CoPs today and help build the value of online networking.

Note

1. Leong, Shou Ling, et al. "Enhancing Doctor-Patient Communication Using Email: A Pilot Study." *The Journal of the American Board of Family Practice* 18, no. 3 (May–June 2005): 180–88.

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Article citation:

Rulon, Vera. "Communities of Practice—HIM's Social Network" *Journal of AHIMA* 80, no.3 (March 2009): 8.

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