

Ins and Outs of Social Media in Healthcare and HIM

Save to myBoK

by Mary Butler

Joanna Belbey, a social media compliance specialist for Actiance, spoke with the *Journal* for the November/December eCompliance issue about the role of social media and telemedicine in healthcare. As telehealth and social media continues to be an evolving force in healthcare, Belbey elaborated on the pros and cons of its use. The *Journal* also conducted an [interview Belbey via Skype](#) in an effort to demonstrate just how telemedicine and social media might look like in a healthcare setting.

***Journal:* What are the implications of telemedicine on patient care and privacy?**

Belbey: Telemedicine is changing healthcare.

It extends the reach of medicine to rural areas without access to high quality care, and it enables patients to consult with specialists that might be located far away. With the millions of patients coming into the healthcare system for the first time with the Affordable Care Act (ACA), it may enable doctors to treat more patients. In the future, I think we'll see that more and more emergency rooms will have screens to streamline admission and to lower costs for minor medical conditions.

How can thoughtful social media strategies improve patient care?

They can facilitate groups with similar diseases that might want to get together to talk about their treatments, their symptoms, things they've tried. They could offer great value to the patients, the healthcare community. That would reflect positively on their brand.

Look at the Mayo Clinic. They have some short videos on medical procedures, and innovative procedures where they have the patient talking and show you what they've done and talk about their lifestyle. It's extraordinary. They're educating the public and they're enhancing their brand.

When did concerns about the use of social media in healthcare settings start, and why?

Fairly recently. The healthcare industry recognizes there's an opportunity to communicate with patients or the consumer directly and reach millions of people. If you think about the ACA, you have millions more people in the healthcare system. They want to talk about their doctors, their treatment options, they want to read reviews of hospitals. They're consumers. They want to use social media in the way they use everything else.

And on the other hand, the healthcare industry understands, but needs to put together thoughtful policies on, how they're going to have that conversation with the patients and the consumers.

What are the risks of deploying social media technologies?

There are basically three risks around security, compliance, and enablement.

Security

IT needs to secure the corporate network, making sure that confidential patient information doesn't leak out of the organization.

IT also needs to protect the organization from incoming threats. People these days are fairly well educated on the dangers of phishing e-mail and generally don't get tricked into downloading files that contain malware. However, that learning hasn't translated to other forms of communication. So, when I'm connected to somebody on Facebook, or over instant messaging for

example, I'm more likely to trust messages from what appear to be my friends. Cyber criminals understand that these new channels of communications are far more receptive to attack.

Compliance

Compliance professionals are tasked with making sure the companies stay out of the regulatory and legal crosshairs. In fact, there are more than 10,000 rules and regulations that impact electronic communications in the US alone. Plus the specific rules around ACA, HIPAA, the *employee retirement income security act (ERISA)* and the local state laws. Your compliance department is also responsible for providing proof of compliance when regulators conduct their on-site exams. And, finally, if the company is sued, they are mired in electronic discovery which can take days and weeks to piece together conversations.

Enablement

Your executive team is likely concerned about enablement and the organization's productivity and bottom line. Employees need to be able to collaborate in real time over an instant messaging (IM) platform, enterprise social software, and unified communications. Your sales enablement or marketing team needs to train sales to engage clients and build customer relationships over social networks. And, once you've invested in the tools, how do you get everyone to adopt them and be productive? Finally, you will want to show ROI on your communications investments.

What are some basic steps a workplaces can take to prevent social media problems?

- They need third party technology. They need, for example, something for e-communications, whether e-mail or IM, firms need to put technology infrastructure in place to archive those communications.
- Some organizations choose to pre-review content, including social media, distributed by the marketing department
- Or they may allow people to use social media and allow people to review it after the fact.
- They need lexicons in place that will alert them when certain words are being used. Could be as simple as profanity or if they want to limit conversation on a particular drug or treatment.

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