READY TO INTERACT: SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY U.S. HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SYSTEMS

Prepared for Scottsdale Institute by CSC’s Global Institute for Emerging Healthcare Practices

SCOTTSDALE INSTITUTE
Executive Summary

Use of social media by hospitals is growing for basic, non-clinical purposes such as marketing, communications and brand management. In most hospitals that use social media, the function is handled by the marketing and/or public relations departments, not clinicians. Hospitals rate their experience with social media as overwhelmingly positive.

Now that organizations are comfortable using social media in a basic unidirectional way, it is time to consider using these technologies more strategically. The next step in maximizing value will be to become more interactive by engaging patients and enhancing patient satisfaction. This next phase could also include connecting consumers and providers and providing insights to inform product development. For this to occur, clinical departments will need to become more involved. For instance, special teams could be formed with clinical representation to respond to certain types of event triggers using clearly-written procedures and guidelines.

Survey Findings

In July and August of 2012, CSC conducted two surveys on the use of social media in hospitals. In this paper, we highlight our key findings and close with our own latest thinking on the topic.

The main purposes for which hospital use social media continue to be related to marketing, brand awareness and brand management. Organizations are also using social media to promote wellness and healthy behaviors through the dissemination of generic information for a general audience. Direct engagement with individual patients remains uncommon. None of the respondents reported using social media to recruit volunteers for clinical trials or to conduct product research and development.

“For what purpose does your organization use social media?” (Top responses)
The focus on brand management and name recognition was also evident in the objectives of organizations using social media. The most popular answers were to build brand recognition, attract new customers, and engage with patients and consumers. Improving patient outcomes was not a popular objective, with only about one-quarter of companies focusing on that objective.

“What are your organization’s primary objectives in using social media?”

(Top responses)

- Engage patients/consumers
- Build greater brand recognition
- Attract new customers
- Increase communication between groups
- Recruit new staff

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were by far the most popular social media tools used by hospitals. Scottsdale Member respondents are bigger users of blogs, Twitter and LinkedIn than healthcare industry respondents in general. (Focusing social efforts on existing communities — where consumers are — makes sense, as these communities invariably will be more active than any website a given healthcare organization can build.) In the free text portion, one respondent noted that their organization uses Yammer, a private social media tool designed specifically for use within enterprises. This can be a good complementary approach for connecting internal audiences.

“Which of the following social media tools does your organization use?”

Very few organizations that responded to our survey do not use social media at all. But among those who do not, the main reasons cited are 1) fear of liability or malpractice concerns, and 2) concerns that users will post negative comments about the organization. A very small number of organizations does not get involved in social media because they do not feel they have the expertise needed.

More than three quarters of respondents have a social media policy in place that helps to communicate to staff how to use social media appropriately. The remaining respondents either do not have such a policy in place or do not know if they have one in place.

Although most hospitals have an internal policy in place to educate employees, fewer have an external disclaimer posted on their site that cautions patients not to construe information as medical advice. Many respondents did not know if they had such a disclaimer.
“Does your organization post a social media disclaimer on your social media site that cautions patients not to take information shared on the site as medical advice?”

As for which department(s) are in charge of managing social media activities, this responsibility overwhelmingly fell to the communications/marketing/public relations department. Only in a negligible number of cases was this placed in the hands of another group, such as IT or clinical care. This is in line with what other recent industry research has found.¹

The hospitals we surveyed rate their overall experience with social media as generally positive. Overall, about six in ten organizations rate it as positive, with another 10 to 20% calling it neutral. The remaining respondents generally say that it is too early to tell. No organization was negative. Scottsdale Institute members were even more positive (72%) than other respondents (53%).

“Overall, how would you rate your organization’s experience with social media”

For the question asking organizations to rate their overall experience with social media, some of the respondents provided interesting free-text follow-up and justification. The comments, edited only for clarity and grammar, include:

“The hospital has found many ‘friends.’ The daily and hourly tracking helps us communicate education content, press releases, daily notes of health and well-being, and just plain getting our brand out without a lot of heavy lifting. What you can publish in less than 3 minutes on social media would not have gotten out for days or weeks in the old printed format.”

“We have had a number of people liking us on Facebook and coming to our events.”

“Physicians, employees, and patients have posted positive comments about their experience with our hospital. We have heard from patients and community members that they have read these posts.”

“We have aggressively pursued the use of social media. It’s been extremely helpful improving communications internally within the organization.”

“We now have less expensive channels to communicate tips for healthy living as well as health system news and events to a broad audience. Also, we have had opportunities to answer questions and resolve issues via social media channels that would have otherwise gone unaddressed.”
Discussion and Recommendations

The results of these surveys confirm our latest thinking on social media, which is that use of social media by healthcare organizations is increasing in adoption, but still relatively basic in complexity and sophistication. We found higher adoption rates (above 70%) than some other researchers (e.g., the 21% reported by Bennett2), but this can be explained by our targeted sample. Our finding of high levels of social media usage for the purposes of marketing, communications and brand management are very consistent with other research, which has found that the vast majority of institutions use social media for unidirectional communication.3

We believe that, having built familiarity and comfort with basic social media use, it is now time for hospitals to use social media in a more advanced way to achieve their strategic goals.

Social media has most certainly arrived. The movement has millions of active users, is based on mature technology, and for many people it has the cachet of being new, fast, exciting and more “authentic” than many traditional modes of communication (e.g., commercials, printed literature, press releases).

Research has found that people are expanding their personal peer network to online peers, and that they are increasingly using this network as a source of health-related information and advice.4 Many patients report benefitting from connecting with other patients experiencing the same symptoms and being directed to relevant patient education materials.5

Health professionals, of course, do continue to play a central role for people when they need health information and attention.6 Social media can influence where patients go and to whom they turn when they need or want to engage. Hospitals can and should use social media to help achieve strategic goals. They should look for opportunities to go beyond just listening to consumers to connecting consumers and providers, gaining insights to inform product development, and responding to patient needs more rapidly.

Social media can also be a tremendously powerful tool for enhancing patient satisfaction. In one account, a hospital’s patient satisfaction team noticed a tweet sent from a patient who was dissatisfied with his long wait in the waiting room, and upon responding found that the patient had failed to check in properly.7 Note, however, that if an organization boasts its ability to connect and respond to patient needs, then service expectations rise for things like turnaround time and complaint resolution.8

Another important aspect of the next generation of care is patient engagement. Social media, which often complements mobile devices, can help organizations motivate patients to become more active participants in their own care.

The best practices and leading edge ideas for social media are still evolving, but some basic recommendations include:

• **Develop an overarching strategy** of how to make social media work for you. Begin with easy areas such as marketing and communications, proceed to patient education and announcements, and then look for ways to leverage social media to improve care and generate other benefits. Look for ways to connect patients to providers, or providers to each other.

• **Get involved in social media now** at whatever level you feel comfortable with and/or have the resources to manage (do not take a wait-and-see attitude or it will be too late and your patients will find someone else to interact with). It is often possible to recruit savvy users internally who are excited about the technology.

• **Preempt possible negative experiences by communicating openly** about social media with employees and with patients. Develop a social media policy that outlines appropriate use for staff, and post a disclaimer on your site informing patients that information provided is not meant to serve as medical advice. Social media is a force for good; concerns about the use of social media are often overstated. Individuals are more likely to share positive health-related experiences via social media than negative experiences.
About the Surveys
The information in this paper is based on two surveys conducted by CSC in July and August of 2012. The topic studied was the use of social media by hospitals. The two surveys consisted of essentially the same questions, with small modifications made only to accommodate for demographic differences. We asked member organizations of the Scottsdale Institute and healthcare organizations at large about how they are using social media tools.

The precise question wordings and answer options can be found in appendices I and II. We received 19 completed responses from Scottsdale Institute member organizations, and 17 completed responses from other healthcare organizations in the industry.
Appendix I. Survey Questions
(Audience: Scottsdale Members)

Scottsdale Institute Social Media Survey

Thank you for attending CSC's presentation on social media, offered in coordination with the Scottsdale Institute. We hope you found the topic and content interesting. In the interest of continuing our research, we are inviting attendees to complete this brief follow-up survey.

If you choose to take this survey, your answers will be kept confidential and you will not be named or identified in any way. Furthermore, we will not contact you with any questions or requests unless you wish to provide your contact information at the end of the survey.

1a) What is the name of your Scottsdale Institute member organization?

1b) Which site location (for your member organization)?

1c) Which of the following best describes your organization?

- Hospital
- Health plan
- Academic medical center
- Health system
- Physician organization
- Other (please specify)

2) For what purpose does your organization use social media? (check all that apply)

- Marketing services or products
- Workforce recruitment
- Brand management
- Consumer relations
- Distribute educational information
- Encourage health professional education/collaboration
- Host your own online community
- Promote wellness and healthy behaviors
- Monitor patients and/or populations
- Aid in care coordination and/or care management
- Recruit volunteers for clinical trials
- Facilitate research collaboration
- Product research and development
- Reputation management (i.e., monitoring and responding to what is being said about you)
- We don’t use social media
- Other (please specify)

3) What are your organization’s primary objectives in using social media? (choose up to three)

- Attract new customers
- Build greater brand recognition
- Increase communication between groups
- Engage patients/consumers
- Improve patient outcomes
- Recruit new staff
- Locate volunteers for clinical trials
- Gain new insight to develop new products
- Don’t know
- Other (please specify)

4) Which of the following social media tools does your organization use? (check all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs (i.e., your organization writes its own blog)
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- None
- Other (please specify)

5) If your organization does not use social media, why not?

- Social media is just a fad; it’s not worth bothering with
- Fear of liability or malpractice concerns
- Concerns that users will post negative comments about your organization
- Too much work
- Lack of social media expertise
- Other (please specify)

6) Does your organization have a social media policy that outlines appropriate social media use for staff?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

7) Does your organization post a social media disclaimer on your social media site that cautions patients not to take information shared on site as medical advice?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

8) Which department(s) manage your organization’s social media activities?

- Communications / Marketing / Public relations
- IT
- Clinical departments (i.e., care management, care coordination)
- It is decentralized across many departments
- Other (please specify)

9) Overall, how would you rate your organization’s experience with social media?

- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral
- Too soon to tell
- Other (please specify)

10) Please describe why you rated your organization’s experience as positive, negative, neutral, or too soon to tell.

11a) Would you be willing to be interviewed if we wish to follow up with you?

- Yes
- No

11b) If yes, please provide us with your email address.
### Social Media in Healthcare

**1a) What is the name of your organization?**

- Hospital
- Health plan
- Academic medical center
- Health system
- Physician organization
- Other (please specify)

**1b) Which of the following best describes your organization?**

- Hospital
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### Social Media in Healthcare

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### Social Media in Healthcare

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### Social Media in Healthcare

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### Social Media in Healthcare

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### Social Media in Healthcare

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- Positive
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### Social Media in Healthcare

**10) Please describe why you rated your organization's experience as positive, negative, neutral, or too soon to tell.**

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### Social Media in Healthcare

**11) To receive early notice of any white paper that may be published as a result of this survey, provide us with your email address.**

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References


6. (Pew Internet, 2011)


8. (PwC 2012)
Healthcare Group
3170 Fairview Park Drive
Falls Church, VA 22042
+1.800.345.7672
healthcaresector@csc.com

Worldwide CSC Headquarters
The Americas
3170 Fairview Park Drive
Falls Church, VA 22042
United States
+1.703.876.1000

Europe, Middle East, Africa
Royal Pavilion
Wellesley Road
Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 1PZ
United Kingdom
+44(0)1252.534000

Australia
26 Talavera Road
Macquarie Park, NSW 2113
Australia
+61(0)29034.3000

Asia
20 Anson Road #11-01
Twenty Anson
Singapore 079912
Republic of Singapore
+65.6221.9095

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