

Health Information Compliance Alert

Social Media: Help, Hype, or Hindrance: Social Media Can Be the Key to Revenue Rewards

Ramp up your social media presence with this cyber advice.

Due to the onset of social media over the past decade, people's lives and livelihoods are on display 24/7. We publish, debate, catalog, and market ourselves, documenting permanently the sum of our collective existence.

An online presence via a variety of digital platforms is essential to running a successful healthcare business today. Unfortunately, the ramifications of negative cyber babble from patients, former employees, business partners, and even competitive providers can force a well-meaning practice to fold — not to mention recognizing in your plans the importance of HIPAA, the ONC, the OCR, and a plethora of other governmental rules and regulations that relate to medicine and the internet.

Whether you are a social media novice or your practice is the envy of networkers everywhere, it's always a smart idea to set parameters, regularly reevaluate the benefits, and generally police your practice's digital output.

Put a Plan Together First

Before you click "like" and upload your practice's services to the web, you may want to consider asking yourself and your team why and how you plan to implement, utilize, and promote social media in your office. What you post and advocate says a lot about you as a provider, so outlining your objectives up-front is always a wise decision.

"Social media is the chosen means of communication, sourcing and learning for billions of people worldwide. Medical practices understand this and may feel there is a rush to jumping onboard," says **Howard Luks MD**, Principal with Symplur, LLC. "The risk is that a practice will rush to implement a social media strategy, but they spend very little time determining what their goals are, what their message is and exactly how they're going to try to get that message to resonate."

Professional guidance. Online Reputation Management (ORM) is a serious matter in healthcare today, and oftentimes health IT professionals are better equipped to handle social media wants, needs, and concerns than practitioners. As value-based care evolves and HIPAA-compliant initiatives aimed at protecting patients' PHI on the web emerge, it may be vital to engage with a certified social media company.

"Working with the right professionals before you spend a dime on an IT or digital strategy is important for a multitude of reasons... the most important of which is that you need to understand social. You need to understand your audience," Luks explains. "You need to be able to craft a message to reach that audience, and you must be available to answer the audience when they question you in return. Otherwise your time in the social sphere will be a big waste of time, energy, and money."

Tap Into Your Potential

Prior to meeting with a health IT expert to either enhance your outreach or improve your image, you might want to think about conducting a social media audit and include your office staff in the process.

An audit will allow you to look at practice inconsistencies online, determine whether your online presence (or lack of one) is causing you to lose patients, and pinpoint what you really want to pursue with social media. Patient engagement, learning and sharing information with other providers, or simply stating your practice hours and services — a comprehensive study will determine the advice you should seek.

Audit tips. Here are some key points that you may want the answers to before you finesse your practice's digital

resume:

- Analyze where you see the practice gaining and losing patients, uncovering ways to bring new patients into the fold while retaining the old ones. Are review sites like Healthgrades your nemesis, where patients can anonymously shame you for the slightest offense? Or are social sites like Facebook your enemy, where the fine HIPAA line is often walked?
- Watch for discrepancies amongst the various sites. Are your name, bio, contact info, and practice location correct? Are the financial details of your practice accurate? Are the various references to you, your services, and possibly patients HIPAA-compliant?
- Check out other providers' social, review, and practice sites. After you compare and contrast their pages and reviews with your accounts, determine if yours are up-to-speed. If they are lacking, figure out why and what you can do to improve your cyber image, seeking the advice of a health IT expert and managing social media.

Locate the Problem Zones

Once you've outlined your plan, ensure that your information is safe and secure. With Advancing Care Information (ACI) and pay-for performance care on the rise, more patient engagement will occur online. This could be in the way of an EHR but could also be through education resources on YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook. Cyberattacks are on the rise, and this is one of the reasons a professional should be secured for the initial setup.

"It's impossible to guard against hacking altogether. The most important steps that practices can take is to have policies and procedures in place so that everyone knows what to do if a laptop is stolen, a thumb drive disappears, or their system is breached," Luks says. "Working with the right IT security team experienced in the healthcare world can help mitigate the eventual damage which might occur if your practice is a victim of hacking."

Final thoughts. Whatever your motivation, having a design in mind will make the process run more smoothly, Luks suggests. "There are a multitude of tools available depending on the platforms practices plan on utilizing," he says. "Within a few years most of the information on Facebook will be predominantly video-based. How are you going to prepare for that? If you're not, your competitors are... and your potential patients will find them before they find you."

Resource. For more information about Dr. Luks and Symplur, visit <http://www.symplur.com/signals/>.