Bringing the Social Media #Revolution to Health Care

Jennifer Torres, MSSW, MPH


The book begins by providing a framework for the innovative practices that have been spearheaded by leaders at the Mayo Clinic. The introduction discusses the creation of the Mayo Clinic Center for Social Media, a center that serves to coordinate and focus the clinic’s various social media initiatives and programs. This section highlights the philosophy of the clinic’s social media policies, which indicate that the clinic believes that individuals have the right and responsibility to advocate for their own health and that the use of social media tools can help them get the best information on their health as well as connect with providers in order to make healthy choices.

The first section, “Getting Inspired,” provides insights by experts in the field who have been at the forefront of moving the social media revolution forward. The chapter showcases four commentaries from experts that provide great insights for why organizations should be interested in establishing and moving forward with a social media platform for their organization. The commentaries provide great insights for the benefits of using social media.

One of the commentaries indicate that some of the benefits of engaging in social media for an organization could be the following: coauthorship for research articles, speaking invitations, committee appointments, Health Promotion Practice

November 2015 Vol. 16, No. (6) 785–787
DOI: 10.1177/1524839915601368
© 2015 Society for Public Health Education

Bringing the Social Media #Revolution to Health Care is a book developed by the Mayo Clinic focused on using the social media revolution to improve patient care and communication at every stage of the care trajectory. The book provided an in-depth overview of Mayo Clinic’s experiences in using social media as a means of engaging patients, caregivers, and providers in clear, open, two-way communication at every point of care. The goal of this book is to demonstrate how active engagement between providers, patients, and caregivers can have an impact on patient and provider satisfaction, patient compliance, and clinical outcomes. The book showcases how the Mayo Clinic’s Center for Social Media has used the social media revolution to enhance the real value of health care for their patients without the constraints of time or geography. This book can serve as a good resource for health educators, clinic administrations, health system communication departments, physicians, and students who may want to develop a social media platform to enhance the communication practices of their organizations.

Keywords: social media; patient engagement; two-way communication; clinic IT; social network; referral portal; technology; Internet; Web-based; Twitter; Facebook; blogging; network; community resources; Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA); Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act

Author’s Note: Address correspondence to Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, USA; e-mail: jentorres12@gmail.com.
consulting opportunities, and access to unique data sets. The opportunities discussed provide a nice overview of the networking options that social media use provides not only the user of the platform but also the person developing the platform. The next commentary highlights converging trends within the health care industry relating to social media: (1) workforce demographics: staff who grew up with social media getting into more senior management positions, (2) patient expectations: patients using social media to connect with hospitals and health care professionals for themselves and their families, and (3) patient communities: used to empower patients to use social media in order to take charge of their own health and encourage others to do the same. The trends discussed provide a nice overview of what social media looks like today and how organizations can use these trends to enhance their current social media platforms to attract more traffic and to provide information that will be beneficial to the individuals who will be using their social media sites for health information.

The third commentary discusses why social media makes sense for health care. This commentary states that with social media, patients can now communicate about their health with families and friends at any time and could use this platform as a means for sharing fears and experiences about diagnoses, and to connect with people across the globe who maybe struggling with similar health conditions. The author suggests that through social media resources patients can learn from one another and receive the support they may need with their health conditions. The last commentary in the first section discusses how social media begins with people. The commentary suggests that social media use should be based on problems you can solve, processes you can improve, and ways you can deliver value to people.

The second section, titled “Being Strategic,” discusses approaches and strategies to developing a social media platform for an organization. The section provides several useful commentaries for how organizations, especially health systems can be strategic in their approach to developing and disseminating information on social media platforms. The commentaries suggest that there are several strategies to developing a social media platform.

The authors indicate that organizations should start from their business and priority goals and use these tools to help advance their goals. The authors also suggest that organizations become very familiar with the various types of social media tools available to them and think about how each of those platforms will serve to advance organizational goal and objectives. They also indicate that organizations should think about creating social media platforms that are worth following and build a network of peers who will not only follow the platform but also contribute to and assist with the dissemination of these social media resources. All of the commentaries suggest that the development of a strategic plan for dissemination is essential in the implementation of social media practices. The section suggests that organizations should plan early, plan often, and be flexible as social media is an ever-evolving practice. Last, the section discusses a very important component in the development and implementation of social media practices for an organization: patient/participant privacy. The section discusses two major regulations in the health care arena that should be front and center when setting up social media engagement practices for an organization: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act. These two Acts require businesses to meet a minimum level of compliance relative to handling personal health information of patients. The section states that privacy must be embedded at the point of development and implementation whether you are designing the patient portal or are using a third-party organization to design and implement it. The authors state that a guide should be provided to anyone who will be engaging in social media. The guide should include basic rules of engagement for the user and information to ensure they will not put their personal health information at risk.

The third section, titled “Blogging,” identifies different types of social media platforms available to organizations. The authors of the commentaries in this section focus on the practical utility of using blogs for dissemination of information rather than other social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook. The authors indicate that blog use has some benefits that other forms of social media do not, like providing a social support forum where individuals can speak freely about their treatment and experiences. The authors indicate that blogging assists organizations in building loyal relationships with the community they serve, humanizes the organization as it allows for followers to personally connect with the writer of the particular blog, provides the organization with a voice giving staff the opportunity to share and connect with the individuals they serve, and last, aids in boosting Web visibility through Web traffic created by visitors to the blog.

The final section of the book, titled “Social Networking,” provides several commentaries on the various social media resources available to health professional and organizations to use as a platform for visibility and net-
working potential. The commentaries discuss platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Pintrest, and Health Care Videos. The authors suggest that these various platforms provide great opportunities for both the individuals and the organization to disseminate information and build relationships. For example, one of the commentaries focused on Pintrest. The author provide insight on how caregivers might use this platform to provide ongoing encouragement and emotional support for their patients through images that might enhance mood or outlook. Another commentary shared how online videos are easy and powerful ways to reach audiences as many individuals are visual learners. The commentary states that videos can both raise health awareness and facilitate the advocacy efforts of an organization. All of the commentaries that are included as part of this section offered both the individual and the organization with great resources for developing and enhancing their social media presence. The section provides a great resource for how these platforms can be used to disseminate health information and for how to use these platforms as a means for improving patient access to information and care.

Last, the book provides the reader with a wealth of resources in the Appendix section. The appendix provides information on how to keep your social media platforms legal with regard to privacy and compliance with rules and regulations. This section offers great insights on privacy and compliance issues. This appendix serves as a great resource for getting started and for continued monitoring for an organization that may be moving forward with developing or implementing a social media platform. The next section of the appendix provides the reader with a step-by-step checklist for strategic planning in setting up a framework for their social media platform. This resource would be useful to any organization thinking of moving forward with the development of a social media plan for their organization.

**SUMMARY**

The way we communicate and disseminate information is rapidly changing. With the continued growth of the Internet and social media, it is important for individuals and organizations to develop a better understanding of these technologies and their impact on health communication. *Bringing the Social Media #Revolution to Health Care* provides the reader with a wealth of information on the what and why of social media and the positive impacts that leveraging this platform can have not just on the organization but also on the individuals who use the resource as a means of information. The book can serve as a great resource for health care practitioners who are looking for innovative ways to connect with their patients and community.