The Benefits and Problems of using Health Care Blogs

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Introduction
Are you confident using web 1.0? Are you maximizing the benefits of web 2.0, the interactive internet? Are you knowledgeable about blogs and bloggers? If these questions seem as if they originated in a science fiction novel, the next generation of health care workers may be overlooking your organization.

A brief history lesson of the web may be helpful. Web 1.0 provided information without interaction. Web pages were available to internet users, but people viewing websites in web 1.0 were unable to interact with the information or the individual(s) behind the information. When web 1.0 entered the workplace, health care organizations seized the opportunity of presenting their health care system on the world wide web. Web 1.0 allowed health care organizations to design websites that provided information, facts, directions to locations and descriptions of services provided.

Web 2.0 offers interaction on the world wide web. Blogs, social networking, wikis and virtual worlds are examples of web 2.0. Blogs are a popular form of interactive communication. They are free, users needn’t be computer savvy, and blogs can be enabled for comment moderation, giving total control of what appears on the blog to the blog owner. Once a blog is established, blog authors write their ideas and readers write responses.

Health care organizations need to maximize the benefits of blogs while minimizing the challenges Why? Because future health care workers are using blogs in college and high school coursework. They will expect health care organizations to utilize these online communication tools to enhance organizational effectiveness. This article will examine the benefits of health care blogs, the challenges of health care blogs and using blogs to strengthen your organization.

The Benefits of Health Care Blogs

Health care bloggers can be found by running a google search or visiting technorati.com. If you haven’t investigated health care blogging, you’ll be amazed by the number of blog sites currently in operation.

Health care bloggers are building a support system of readers who share opinions, thoughts and experiences. These bloggers provide one another support and encouragement. Because the communication is online, bloggers may find it easier to share their concerns and joys.

Blogs are also used to let off steam. Since stress and burnout lead to increased turnover, the ability to write it out and gain support from fellow bloggers may augment retention rates. When a supervisor or coworker is unavailable, blogs are on duty, waiting for comments to be posted. This 24/7/365 access for communication provides an avenue for giving and receiving feedback whenever it’s convenient.
Blogs can become a bridge between generations. Our multigenerational workforce struggles to establish common ground. Younger employees point and click their way around the web with the grace of an ice skater. More experienced employees typically approach the web as if entering a multiple lane freeway just after a ten car pileup. Blogging is one format to bridge the technological divide between the generations.

Due to blogs’ ease of use, they build computer confidence. Staff members who use blogs will develop enhanced confidence in using the web and may branch out into web-based research. Late breaking medical news, clinical best practices and online service improvement sites will be discovered. These discoveries could add value to your health care system as employees gain knowledge.

Blogs can be used as educational tools with bloggers reviewing a health care journal article or book. An online discussion regarding clinical, service or organizational improvement could follow the book review.

Since bloggers link to other blogs, your health care blog could serve as a central meeting point for health care professionals throughout the world.

**The Challenges of Health Care Blogs**

When information is posted to a blog, it’s available to the world. Attorneys, patients, family members and health care advocacy groups are among the users who could access the material on your blog. Before you panic, remember the blog owner is in charge of what appears on the blog. Checks and balances within the organization will ensure appropriate blog postings and enabling comment moderation will allow you to edit or delete offensive material. If your health care organization does not have a policy and procedure governing blog use by your employees, add the development of such a policy to your strategic plan. The health care blogosphere is active and organizations need to provide structure and guidance to employees regarding the appropriate use of blogs.

Health care professionals operate under the ethical mandate of protecting patient confidentiality. Material written on blogs must respect the privacy of patients and their families. No one reading a blog should be able to determine the specific patient the writer is referencing. Don’t let the challenges intimidate you, for the potential benefits of health care blogs are enormous.

**Using Health Care Blogs to Strengthen Your Organisation**

When your organization joins the blogging community, you’ve created a recruitment tool. You’ll make connections with other users of web 2.0. Your organization will be viewed as a progressive system, capable of utilizing the latest communication technologies.

Your health care blog could serve as an employee reward. Tie blog authorship to performance and let successful employees write postings for a month. If the writing is submitted to a member of leadership for editing, you needn’t worry that inappropriate material will appear on your site.

Blogs hold potential as patient education tools. Experts can post educational materials and patients can respond or ask questions. Patient bloggers are numerous and if you’re offering insights about issues they confront, you’ll quickly develop an online following.

If your organization uses mentors or preceptors, your health care blog could provide a communication tool for those paired team members. During the orientation phase of employment, blogs could be
used to monitor staff progress as they transition from new hire to loyal team member. The insights provided by the orientees can be used to improve orientation protocols. Executive teams and managers concerned about spending quality time with employees can use blogs as an avenue of daily communication. Sharing goals, providing the results of patient surveys and offering encouragement are blog opportunities waiting to materialize.

Conclusion

Interactive communication at the click of a mouse can be a daunting prospect. However, web 2.0 is here to stay. Future health care workers are using the interactive web in their classes. At present, patients and professionals are active participants in blog communities. Designing a health care blogsite that serves the needs of the organization, employees and protects patient confidentiality is an important goal. Since patients, professionals and prospective employees are active bloggers, health care organizations need to consider a future in web 2.0. Online health care conversations are daily occurrences. Health care organizations must evaluate the ethical, legal and strategic advantages of joining the dialogue.

Bibliography


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