Effects of Social Media and Online Reviews on Healthcare

Social media has had both positive and negative effects on physicians.

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One of the most significant positive effects of social media on the healthcare industry is the ability to educate and empower patients. Patients can access information about their health conditions, treatment options, and preventive measures on various social media platforms. About 60% of adults in the United States use social media to gather health information.[1] The increase in access to health information has allowed patients and people to gather more knowledge and make informed decisions regarding their healthcare and can lead to better health outcomes.

Social media platforms also have made it easier for healthcare professionals to communicate and collaborate with each other. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twit-

ter), *LinkedIn*, and *Facebook* can facilitate knowledge-sharing among healthcare professionals, leading to better patient care.[2] For example, doctors can use *Facebook* groups and *Facebook Messenger* to discuss generalized doubts, share knowledge, and seek advice from their peers to benefit

the overall community. Social media networks provide a large platform for physicians to engage in public health advocacy and promote health policies and initiatives. Physicians can use social media to raise awareness about public health issues, advocate for policy changes, and encourage community involvement in health-related activities. According to Hawkins et al.,[3] 72% of physicians reported using social media for public health advocacy, which has led to public engagement on major health issues, as well

as increased physician involvement in public health initiatives.

Physician Influencers

Social media platforms have increased the visibility and influence of physicians in today's society. Through social media, physicians can

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build a personal brand, share their expertise with a wider audience, and establish themselves as thought leaders in their field. Roughly 72% of physicians reported that social media had a positive impact on their careers.[4] Dr. Noc, a *TikTok* influencer with 1.7 million followers, shares his health advice with people daily on a global scale. This demonstrates the influence physicians have on the general public, as well as the vast number of opportunities to share tips for

health and well-being with the world.

Facebook, the world's largest social media platform, has had a significant impact on physicians in the healthcare industry. With more than two billion active monthly users, *Facebook* has become one of the most powerful tools for communication, information sharing, and patient engagement. The *Facebook* platform has made it easier for physicians and healthcare professionals to communicate and engage with their patients. A study by the University of Pennsylvania found that patients who interacted with their physicians through *Facebook* were more likely to follow their treatment plans and achieve better health outcomes.[5]

Physicians can use *Facebook* to send appointment reminders, share health tips, and answer patient questions. This has resulted in improved patient engagement and communication, which can lead to better health outcomes.

Facebook also has been an effective tool for communicating health information to the public.[6] Public health agencies can use *Facebook* to share information about disease outbreaks, vaccination campaigns, and other health-related issues. This has led to increased awareness, prevention, and screening.

Implications and Risks

Although *Facebook's* innovations can be very valuable for physicians, one of the biggest concerns associated with its use is the risk of breaches of patient confidentiality or HIPAA violations. Physicians and healthcare professionals are required to maintain patient confidentiality, but *Facebook* makes it easy for physicians and healthcare providers to post information without realizing this could be considered a HIPAA violation. A study by the University of Florida found that 57% of medical residents reported that they had seen violations of patient confidentiality on social media platforms, including *Facebook*.[7]

For example, healthcare providers and researchers may use *Facebook* to recruit patients for studies or to communicate with patients. If proper security measures are not in place, this can result in the unintentional disclosure of patient information, violating many state privacy laws or HIPAA regulations. It is imperative that healthcare providers and researchers understand and adhere to strict privacy and security protocols to ensure that patient confidentiality is maintained.

Online reviews have become an increasingly popular way for patients to share their experiences with the rest of the world. While online reviews can be helpful in providing patients with useful information, they can also have significant life-changing impacts on physicians and the healthcare industry. Online reviews on social media communities such as *X* and *Facebook* have increased transparency in the healthcare industry. Patients have easy access to major social media platforms and can place online reviews to share with healthcare professionals and facilities, which can provide valuable insights for others looking for healthcare services.

Because it is easy for people to access such data online, about 35% of adults in the United States have used online reviews to make daily decisions, including their decision on certain healthcare providers.[8]

Online reviews can also contribute to increased patient satisfaction. Patients who use online reviews to choose their healthcare providers are more likely to be satisfied with the care they receive.[9] Online reviews, used by potential and current patients, can be highly influential in gathering information about their healthcare provider, which could lead to a positive or negative impact when making informed decisions for their future.

Online reviews also carry risks. One of these is that online reviews are not reliable sources to make assumptions from. Anyone can post a review online, whether or not it is accurate. This can lead to the spread of misinformation, which can have negative consequences for healthcare professionals and facilities. One study[10] found that only 35% of online reviews of physicians were based on actual patient experiences.

Negative reviews can damage the reputation of healthcare professionals and facilities, which can lead to a decrease in patient volume and revenue. A single negative review can result in a significant decrease in patient volume.[11] It is clear that online reviews are highly biased. Generally, there is a bias with negative reviews toward physicians online.[12] Patients who are dissatisfied with their care are more likely to leave

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negative reviews, whereas those who are satisfied may not leave reviews at all. This can create an unbalanced representation of healthcare professionals and facilities online.

Challenges, Misinformation, and Burnout

Although social media has brought many positive changes to healthcare, it can have negative impacts on physicians in today's society. One of the most significant of these negative impacts is online harassment and bullying. Social media platforms can provide a space for patients to voice their opinions and share their experiences, but they can also be used to attack and harass physicians. According to one study,[13] almost 25% of physicians reported having been personally attacked or having witnessed a colleague being attacked on social media. Physicians may become the target of online harassment, which can lead to mental and emotional distress, and even affect their clinical practice.

Social media also has contributed to the spread of misinformation about health and medical issues. Many people use social media platforms to share health-related information and advice that can be misleading or inaccurate. Physicians may find themselves hav-

ing to deal with patients who have been misled by the information they have read on social media. According to several different studies,[14,15] 31.2% of health-related tweets are spreading inaccurate information, and nearly 75% of the most popular health-related videos on *YouTube* contained misleading or inaccurate information regarding COVID-19 during the peak of the outbreak in the United States in 2020.

Social media platforms have made it easy for anyone to share information, regardless of whether or not it is accurate. As a result, there is an increased risk of misinformation being spread on social media, which can have negative consequences for patients.

Social media also can be a time-consuming distraction for physicians. Physicians may find themselves spending more time on social media than they should, which can affect their productivity and clinical practice. One study[16] found that nearly 50% of physicians reported that social media use had a negative impact on their productivity. In some cases, physicians also may struggle to balance their personal and professional lives due to social media use.

Finally, social media use has led to a decrease in job satisfaction for physicians who use social media regularly. Physicians may become overwhelmed by the amount of negative feedback they receive on social media and feel that their efforts to engage with patients on social media are not appreciated. This can lead to feelings of burnout and reduced job satisfaction. Physicians who reported negative experiences on social media were more likely to experience burnout.[17] When physicians experience burnout, they may be less attentive and less empathetic, and this could result in misdiagnosis, medication errors, and other adverse outcomes for patients.

Conclusion

Social media has had both positive and negative effects on physicians and the healthcare industry. Although social media has facilitated patient education and empowerment, better communication, and collaboration, it also has raised concerns about patient confidentiality breaches, the spread of misinformation, and the risk of burnout among healthcare professionals. As the use of social media in the healthcare industry increases, it is essential for physicians and healthcare organizations to take steps to mitigate these risks and maximize the benefits for the future. **PM**

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