

GUIDE

Health Care

The 4-Step Guide to Driving Greater Patient Engagement



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The 4-Step Guide to Social Media in Health Care

In recent years, the health care industry has had to adapt to a dramatic shift in customer behavior. Today's patients are increasingly using social media, search engines, and crowdsourced online resources such as Wikipedia to guide their own health care decisions. They are conducting their own research and talking with their peers about doctors, procedures, medicines, and more. Online demand continues to grow for medical information that is trustworthy, engaging, and accessible to digitally empowered customers.

Several leading health care providers have responded to this demand by creating highly social and mobile experiences for patients—all while staying fully compliant with regulators. These leaders have demonstrated that moving forward into a new era of patient engagement is not only possible, but imperative for organizations that want to remain competitive.

There is also a growing recognition within the industry that prohibiting social media use among health care professionals is neither realistic nor in the interest of patients.

According to Lee Aase, the Director of the Social Media Center at the Mayo Clinic, health care workers should be expected to use social media to fulfill their responsibilities. He argues the industry must adopt the mindset that the “effective application of social media is part of professionalism.”¹

We believe individuals have the right and responsibility to advocate for their own health, and it's our responsibility to help them use social media tools to get the best information, and connect with providers as well as one another.

Mayo Clinic Social Media Health Network

Medical professionals are dedicated to the public good and feel an ethical responsibility to educate and assist those in need. With social media, they have an unparalleled opportunity to connect with patients and promote good health decisions. The onus is now on health care providers to support practitioners with the security, education, and compliance solutions they need to meet these ethical obligations.

This guide will provide you with four key steps to prepare your organization for greater patient engagement.

1. Drive results by focusing on business goals

Social media presents so many options for your health care organization that it can be easy to lose focus. Perhaps a new social network comes along and grabs your attention, or one of your competitors runs a flashy campaign that your boss asks you to emulate. However, it's important to concentrate on supporting high-level organizational goals, such as improving health outcomes or driving more referrals from patients and doctors. When planning a social media initiative or campaign, make sure to define specific and measurable objectives that tie back to your organization's primary goals. Doing so at the outset will help your team not only focus its efforts but also demonstrate ROI.

Here are five key business considerations that should guide every social media initiative:



Audience: Who are you trying to reach? (patients, families, health care professionals)



Channel: How are you going to reach them? (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook)



Objective: What are you trying to achieve? (educate patients, share success stories)



Metrics: How will you know you have succeeded? (customer inquiries, website traffic, patient satisfaction scores)



Business goal: How will this benefit your organization? (increased visibility, greater market share, additional referrals from doctors)

2. Match your strategy with your patient's journey

As patients take more control over their health care decisions, it becomes critical to know how to engage and support them both online and offline. By monitoring social media, blogs, forums, review sites and other digital sources, your team can better understand what patients want and need. This intelligence can be applied throughout your organization to improve messaging, care delivery, and patient satisfaction, but this guide will focus on how your social media team can use it to create relevant content and communities for each stage of the patient's journey.

Presymptomatic

Your key goals in this stage should be to stay top-of-mind, build credibility, and drive awareness of your major competencies. At this point, people are unaware of their health issues and not actively looking for information. However, they may be cognizant of potential issues, such as hereditary disorders or lifestyle-related diseases. In addition to paid advertising and earned media coverage, they can be reached through educational social media campaigns to promote healthy living, disease prevention, or proactive testing. They can also become aware of your organization when current patients, former patients, and their families share health care experiences on social media.

Opportunity: Public education

Stay top of mind with potential patients and drive brand awareness

Tactic	Channels	Metrics
Make senior staff available as experts to foster reputation and promote your facility's specialty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog • Twitter Chats • Facebook Page 	Impressions
Drive public awareness with healthy lifestyle education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsite • Youtube • Podcasts 	Customer Inquiries
Earn PR and media opportunities with live video streams of treatments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube 	Website Traffic
		Social Shares

Symptomatic

Self-guided online discovery begins here. According to research from Pew, 35% of Americans have gone online to try to figure out what medical condition they or someone else might have. Unsurprisingly, 77% of online health seekers say they began their self-diagnosing process with a search engine.² Supporting search engine optimization (SEO) should therefore be a key objective of your social media strategy for this stage. Keep in mind that the audience for this content will also include the friends and family members of your potential patients. Half of online health inquiries are made on behalf of someone else.

Opportunity: Online discovery

Educate patients as they search for health information about specific symptoms or conditions

Tactic	Channels	Metrics
Content marketing to own search keywords related to symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid Social Media • SEO • Microsite • YouTube 	New Patient Inquiries
Patient Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsite • Facebook Group • Twitter 	Google Search Rankings
		Local Search Visibility

Diagnosis

46% of online diagnosers say that the information they found online led them to think they needed the attention of a medical professional, and 41% say a medical professional confirmed their diagnosis.³ After receiving a diagnosis, many patients continue their online research. They consult online reviews or rankings of health care services and treatments, and read or watch content that documents other patient experiences. An effective tactic at this stage is to “own” clusters of keywords around a treatment or condition by creating highly educational content, such as a YouTube video series.

Opportunity: New patient acquisition

Provide content marketing to own search keywords related to conditions and treatments

Tactic	Channels	Metrics
Content marketing to own search keywords related to conditions and treatments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paid Social Media• SEO• Microsite• YouTube	Appointment Bookings
Show facilities to potential patients and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instagram• YouTube• Tumblr	App Downloads
Share success stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsite• Blog• YouTube	Live Information Sessions

Treatment

According to IMS, “Those seeking information are more likely to turn to conventional digital sources, while those in need of emotional support will be more drawn to social media platforms.” Your organization can help ameliorate the emotional strain of treatment and improve health outcomes by facilitating peer-to-peer patient interaction. For example, the Livestrong Foundation has brought together people affected by cancer in a social community called [CancerHacks](#), where they can share “practical solutions to everyday problems.”

This stage also presents an enormous opportunity for nurses and doctors to directly engage with patients on social media. The U.S. Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, for example, has a team of more than 50 nurses who monitor and interact with patients through their professional accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Their monitoring has allowed them to recognize risk signals and intervene to prevent [multiple suicides](#).⁴

Opportunity: Improved health outcomes

Support patients and employees to deliver better care

Tactic	Channels	Metrics
Support treatment & rehabilitation through patient communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsite• Instagram• Vine• Facebook Group	Health Outcome Measures
Patient monitoring and pastoral support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Twitter• Facebook	
Recruit top health care professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LinkedIn	Time to Hire Retention Cost to Hire
Facilitate internal collaboration on care issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Social Network• Private Facebook Group	Employee Engagement
Educate staff and share news across multiple facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Twitter	Hospital Efficiency

Rehab and recovery

Having received surgery or other medical treatment, patients still need to rehabilitate and cope with long-term health outcomes. Social communities can help patients and their loved ones live healthily, avoid reinjury, and share success stories. You can encourage patients to amplify their positive experiences by providing them with shareable social content and creating moderated social galleries for patient photos and videos. This stage is also an excellent time to solicit customer feedback and crowdsource ideas for service improvements.

Opportunity: Patient satisfaction and loyalty

Drive referrals and secure satisfaction-dependent funding

Tactic	Channels	Metrics
Peer-to-peer patient communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsite• Facebook Group• Instagram Galleries	Patient Satisfaction
Gain feedback on new initiatives and crowd-source ideas for improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Twitter• Facebook	Net Promoter Score
		Referrals

3. Be proactive about security and compliance

Avoiding social media will not only put your organization at a competitive disadvantage but also prevent you from effectively addressing social media risks. It is imperative to tackle security and compliance issues head-on rather than reacting to them after the fact. Here are the critical proactive measures that every health care organization should take to mitigate the risk of a security or compliance breach:

Secure your publishing environment

Lock down your social media profiles within a social relationship platform (SRP), and then provision limited publishing permissions to team members.

This will drastically reduce your organization's exposure to social media hackings that arise from phishing and password theft, because employees will no longer need direct access to branded social media accounts. It will also prevent anyone from publishing non-compliant content or malware directly to your organization's social networks.

Implement pre-publishing review

Establish an approval process and automated content review to ensure that all outgoing social content is compliant with internal policy and legal requirements before being published on your social channels. Here's how:

- **Set up a publishing approval workflow** through your SRP, so junior team members, contractors, and general employees can't publish messages without authorization.
- **Reinforce your manual procedures** with an additional layer of safety. Since human error is a fact of life, look for an SRP with integrated compliance enforcement technology that will automatically screen outbound communications and halt the publication of non-compliant and malicious content before it reaches a social channel.

Keep your policy enforcement up to date

Your organization's communications and brand guidelines may evolve over time, so be prepared to adjust your social media policy accordingly. Regulatory policies are also subject to change as regulators identify new risks and release new guidance. Adopt a social relationship platform with compliance technology that can manage your custom social media policies and continually updates its data classifiers to meet changing regulatory standards.

Moderate user generated content

The comment sections of your YouTube videos and Facebook posts are prime targets for spam, malware, and phishing attacks. Your patients are also liable to inadvertently reveal personal information on these channels. In addition, your organization may be held liable for comments and other user generated content that promotes off-label uses of medication.

- **Scan all URLs and user generated content** using automated compliance technology to ensure that it is malware-free and in compliance with your predetermined policies.

Archive social media communications

Retaining inbound and outbound social messages is vital to achieving compliance with regulatory and ediscovery requirements. During a regulatory audit or legal proceeding, your organization will need to retrieve a secure record of what was published to which social network, and by whom.

- **Conduct all of your social engagement through a centralized platform** so your organization can archive a comprehensive account of its activity, including records of internal workflows.
- **Integrate social media into your existing archiving protocols** along with other electronic records such as email.

Continuously monitor your brand's social footprint

Watch out for new social media accounts that appear to be affiliated with your brand, including unauthorized accounts. All it takes to compromise your organization is for one doctor or hospital manager to set up an unsanctioned social media profile beyond the reach of your compliance protocols. Even more dangerous are fraudulent accounts, which malicious actors can use to exploit patients. Your team can adopt a two-pronged governance strategy to effectively mitigate these risks:

- **Leverage automated technology to persistently monitor** social networks for any new or fraudulent accounts.
- **Conduct periodic social media audits** to ensure that every official account has a clear purpose and a designated team or individual with primary responsibility.

How We Help

Securely Manage Social Media with Hootsuite

Hootsuite's social relationship platform helps health care organizations manage a unified social strategy across multiple teams and facilities without the high level of risk associated with unsecured or disorganized efforts. With Hootsuite Enterprise, your organization can lock down its social media accounts within a single, scalable environment. Safely engage with your patients, prevent non-compliant content from being published, and archive an auditable record of your activities.

Key Security and Compliance Partners:

NEXGATE

OpenQ

globalRELAY.

4. Educate and activate your employees

“Social media education is a really big part of what we’re doing here at Bupa. We want to be in a position where everyone from care home workers to senior doctors to people at head office are engaged with customers on social media... and being ambassadors for the company.”

Charles Stanton, Group Social Media Manager, Bupa

It's no secret that health care practitioners use the same social media channels as the general population. They watch YouTube for research, leverage LinkedIn to create professional opportunities, and follow Twitter to stay up to date with developments in their field. And like almost everyone else, they're increasingly using Facebook to share updates and photos with their friends and families. This widespread activity entails significant security and compliance risks. However, it also represents a massive untapped opportunity for health care organizations.

Social media education is the key to empowering health care workers with the professional judgment and technical know-how they need in the digital era. With an effective education strategy, your organization can ensure that all employees understand how to use social media professionally, legally, and effectively. But without education, the growing number of health care practitioners and administrators who use social media become increasingly likely to jeopardize their careers and put your organization at risk.

Protect your patients

People often use social media to share the frustrations, joys, and heartbreaks they experience in their professional lives, and health care practitioners are no exception. Without sufficient training, they are highly susceptible to inadvertently disclosing identifiable patient information through social media. Photographs and names aren't the only ways that practitioners can compromise identities; even written descriptions of injuries and conditions can reveal enough information to identify a patient.

- **Include social media in privacy training** so that employees learn how social media fits into the picture when they are educated about the HIPAA privacy rule or other regulatory provisions. Help them by exploring relevant scenarios they may face in their roles with tailored demonstrations and real-world examples of privacy breaches.
- **Create a documented record of social media training** to reduce your organization's liability in the case of a privacy breach. Risk managers should be able to track employee progress and verify completion.

Safeguard your data

Your organization's patient health records are extremely valuable on the black market and an irresistible target for hackers. In July 2014, Community Health Systems, a major hospital operator in the United States, announced that information on 4.5 million patients had been stolen in a cyber attack. And [according to the FBI](#), “the possibility of increased cyber intrusions is likely” for the health care industry. One of the most nefarious pathways that a hacker can take to your organization's data is through its own employees, most of whom are probably active on social media.

- **Educate employees** about how to protect themselves from social engineering scams, malware, phishing, and other social media threats, so they don't give information away that could lead to a major security breach. Ensure that staff manage the privacy settings of their personal social media accounts to limit who can see their content, who can contact them, and who can look them up. Employees should also be educated on best practices for password management.

Empower your employees

Every message or photograph an employee shares can either promote your brand to a wide audience or drag it into a public relations crisis. Therefore, it is vital to methodically transform employees from legal liabilities into highly motivated and well coordinated evangelists for your organization. The first step is to impart an understanding of policy and social media fundamentals to every member of your organization, from the most senior physician to the most junior staff. Once employees are properly educated, they can be leveraged at an organization-wide scale to raise brand awareness and share patient success stories.

- **Provide employees with pre-approved social content** that they can share with their personal and professional networks. When trained employees are equipped with pre-approved content for social sharing, they can feel comfortable advocating for their employer without fear of compliance violations.

“If we weren’t using Hootsuite we’d have a lot of admin, a lot of emails, we would have a lot of inefficiency. For the customer it would be a lot slower, it would feel more clunky, and I think it would lead to a lot more customer frustrations. Hootsuite helps us streamline all that.”

Josie Salkey, Digital Content Manager, Bupa Global

Endnotes

1. Lee Aase, [“The Case for Social Media in Professionalism”](#), 2014.
2. Pew Research Internet Project, [“Health Online 2013”](#), 2013.
3. Pew Research Internet Project, [“Health Online 2013”](#), 2013.
4. Alan Neuhauser, [“Health Care Harnesses Social Media”](#), 2014.

How We Help

Continuous Learning with Hootsuite Educational Programs



Hootsuite’s educational programs are built to empower your employees with:

- Applied skills, tactics, and knowledge needed to execute on social activities
- Strategic education on how social media functions across your organization, aligning to key business objectives
- Assessment and recognition as they progress

Hootsuite University is designed to train teams on social media fundamentals and the Hootsuite dashboard, while **Custom Education** is available to help accelerate social transformation through tailored social media training and education to address specific organization needs. **The Advanced Social Media Strategy Certification (ASMS)** provides advanced coursework and applied credentials for experienced social media professionals and social leaders in your organization to expand their social media skill set.

About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting enterprise.hootsuite.com

Trusted by 744 of the Fortune 1000

