

Tweeting About Health Care in 140 Characters or Fewer

Staying up to date will help you connect to current and new patients.

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As the presence of social media becomes widespread, the uses of the popular sites continue to grow and evolve. For example, Twitter was initially a platform used by tech companies to broadcast updates on their internal work as well as random snippets from their employees' personal lives. The 140 characters said things like, "Just attended a great meeting at the office!" Now, children, celebrities, and even health care professionals are connected to this social network.

If you are looking to update your patients and share new information important in your field, here are some ways to do so in 140 characters or fewer.



TWEET HEALTH CARE FACTS

A new survey was just released, and you want to let all of your patients know the results. An e-mail or a phone call seems like a little much. If you wait to update them at their next appointment, however, the information may be less relevant. This is when a tweet comes in handy: you can send out a link to the full article and the text you want to stress. Patients who follow you can read it at their leisure, and you are making contact with your patients when they are not in your office and sharing information that can help them stay healthy.

POST EVENTS AND CHANGES IN YOUR CLINIC

Your office will not be open on a certain date? Post it. You are running a special in the month of August? Post

it. You are letting people know how to get involved with you and the special events your staff is planning. This eases patients' frustration in terms of making appointments, and you are saving them money through specials. It makes their lives easier and ensures they will keep coming back.

FIND NEW PATIENTS

Today, people want to stay connected, and they like to work with others who want to connect with them. After tweeting your latest health care fact or clinical update, you may be surprised by the number of favorites and retweets from patients or others who like what you had to say. Those actions increase your connectedness. A couple of days later, looking for a new clinic to go to, Sally Sue sees a retweet from you. She searches your clinic's name, finds out it is close by, and boom, she calls and sets up an appointment. The responses you are likely

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GAIN FOLLOWERS

The tips provided in this article will be less helpful if you do not have many followers. Some ideas to keep that follower and retweet count growing include:

- Offer a small discount when someone follows you and shows proof.
- Offer a small discount for every tweet someone retweets (set a limit to decrease spamming).
- Do not overload your Twitter followers with too many tweets in one day. Two or three are appropriate. More will cause people to unfollow you.
- Tweet relevant information. If people interact more with one topic than another, keep more of your tweets along those lines.
- Increase incentives. People are following you, but what makes them stay? After every addition of 1,000 followers (pick your own number), each person will be entered in a raffle (prize can be a coupon, discount, etc.). This will retain followers and encourage their friends to follow you.

Navigating the ever-changing world of social media can be difficult, especially if you are more comfortable with newspaper advertisements or phone calls. Staying current, however, will engage your audience and make your clinic stand out from the rest. ■

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