

# Twitter This: Social Media & Hospitals

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# Health Care Providers & Social Media

- Social media can be useful to providers.
- Providers have legal obligations.
- Providers should be proactive with maintaining control over content and establishing institutional policies on appropriate use.

# What is Social Media and Who Cares?

- Social media: internet-based technologies designed to distribute information and ideas through social interaction.
- Uses widely accessible and scalable technologies (including cell phones).
- Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Orkut, LinkedIn.
- Facebook: 400+ million users
- Non-provider hosted sites (external sites)
  - Different legal obligations may arise when a provider hosts blogs and other media on its own servers.

# What's in it for Health Care Providers?

- April 2010: Hospitals have established:
  - 250 YouTube channels
  - 300 Facebook pages
  - 400 Twitter accounts
- Social Media is useful to Providers:
  - Launch innovative advertising/marketing campaigns
  - Provide patients & families with information
  - Remain competitive with other providers that have established social media presences.

Sign Up

### Virginia Mason Medical Center is on Facebook

Sign up for Facebook to connect with Virginia Mason Medical Center.



## Virginia Mason Medical Center



Wall

Info

Photos

Events

Discussions

Virginia Mason Medical Center + Others

Virginia Mason Medical Center

Just Others

Our mission is to improve the health and well being of the patients we serve - Healing illness is our first priority and is what gives our people the energy for our vision. We are also committed to providing a broad range of services that improve one

#### Information

Founded:  
1920

#### 468 People Like This



Richards  
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**Virginia Mason Medical Center** Join Virginia Mason Medical Center at the 19th Annual Dreambuilders' Ball to celebrate and raise support for Benaroya Research Institute, an international leader in immune system and autoimmune disease research. Entertainment by The Dusty 45's. Proceeds benefit Benaroya Research Institute in finding causes and cures of...

See More



#### 19th Annual Dreambuilders' Ball - Unlocking the Mystery

Saturday, May 8, 2010 at 5:30pm  
The Westin Seattle

6 hours ago · Comment · Like · RSVP to this event

Michael likes this.



**Virginia Mason Medical Center** We're at the Puget Sound Business Journal Health Care of the Future event. Great discussion about health care reform, payment reform, quality & safety, and aligning payment with value to improve health for patients. Follow the conversation on Twitter #psbjhcof and @VirginiaMason.

Yesterday at 9:10am · Comment · Like

Mike and Alisha like this.



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## ChildrensLA

**@WACKOE** thx 4 encouraging folks  
2 follow us! hope ur having a great  
wednesday! :)

about 4 hours ago via web in reply to WACKOE

Have fun w/ the fam @ TJ Martell Family Day @ the CBS Studios  
Backlot in Studio City this SUN! <http://bit.ly/tjmartell>

Name Childrens Hosp L.A.  
Location Los Angeles, CA  
Web <http://www.childr...>

Bio Using Twitter to accomplish our mission - helping sick & injured kids and their families.

2,275 following 2,214 followers 149 listed

Tweets 998

Favorites

Following



# Legal Obligations: Confidentiality

- Providers are ‘covered entities’ under HIPAA & state law
- Affirmative legal obligation to safeguard protected patient information
  - Patient names, addresses, email addresses
- Creating social media content does not implicate privacy laws as long as providers do not post patient information without authorization



# Legal Obligations: Disclaimers

- Given informal nature of social media, providers can remind online visitors that posts are public:
  - “This is a public site. Please do not post personal information about yourself or others, including medical information.”
- Note: outside scope of this presentation, but with institution-hosted media (e.g., blogs), a more complete terms & conditions notice may be appropriate.



# Administrative Controls

- Wide range of administrative controls available to providers that establish social media presence
- Facebook:
  - Content posting restricted to page administrators only (public cannot post content)
  - Closed group – persons must formally request to “join” group before having posting access
  - Default landing – set to “info” so that public sees disclaimer first, before seeing any posted content



# Social Media Policy

- Providers should:
  - Adopt a Social Media Policy for employees and staff
  - Educate staff about the contents of the Policy
  - Enforce policy through imposing consequences for violations

# Social Media Policy: Adopt

- Policy should:
  - Set rules for what information staff can post and say online
  - Remind and educate staff about obligations – patient privacy, protecting proprietary institutional information
  - Clarify appropriate relationships between staff, patients and the public

# Social Media Policy: Educate & Enforce

- Educate:
  - Any policy is only as good as the institutional awareness of it
  - Know the policy; educate staff at hire and push periodic updates
- Enforce:
  - Follow through with penalties for violations

# Social Media Policy: Provisions & Examples

- Policy statement: “Employees can use social media for business-related purposes subject to restrictions in this Policy to ensure compliance with legal requirements and institutional policies.”
- Scope of policy – separate provisions for institution-hosted and externally hosted sites.

# Social Media Policy: Provisions & Examples

- Rules for use:
  - Maintain patient privacy
  - Respect patients and other staff – no libelous or defamatory speech
  - Safeguard proprietary institutional information
  - Comply with copyright, trademark and other law
  - Do not communicate on “behalf” of institution
  - No patient-specific medical advice



# Questions?