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Dr. Blogger

Nashua physician is an online resource

By John "jaQ" Andrews jandrews@hippopress.com

Dr. Kevin Pho, a physician practicing in south Nashua, has a secret identity as KevinMD, the writer of a prominent medical blog. Posting medical articles and writing his own opinion pieces on current medical issues, he interacts with Web surfers who comment on his writings. He emphasized that he shies away from giving individual medical advice on his site – “There’s a whole medical-legal hurdle” there, he said. Recent highlights on his [site](#) have included a link to a news article about medical students’ carrying PDAs and a link to another on addiction to tanning (complete with physical withdrawal symptoms).

There must have been about a hundred links along the side of [your blog] — everything from [British Medical Journal](#) to [Boing Boing](#). How do you decide what gets linked?

Basically, it’s mostly medical stuff, and peppered in is some stuff that I like to read as well. [Boing Boing](#), [InstaPundit](#) ... Medical blogging’s been going on, I’d say maybe five years now, and my blog is one of the most trafficked medical blogs out there. Not that there are that many medical blogs, probably less than 500 or so. But it gets about five to eight thousand visitors a day, 170,000 a month, which is pretty good.

You’re a practicing physician now, right?

Yep, I work at the Nashua Medical Group. I’ve been there almost four years now. Internal medicine. I did my residency in medical school down at Boston University and I came up here about four years [ago] now. I’m in a group of five right now.

Now what does “internal medicine” entail?

Basically adult medicine.

How many patients do you have on your roster at the moment?

On my panel it’s about, maybe 1,400 right now. Still growing ... it’s not unheard of for a primary care doctor to have patient panels between three and four thousand. So my practice is definitely still growing.

Did you assume patients from some of the other doctors in your group?

Initially I took over from someone who retired, and then basically the last couple years it’s been growing the practice.

Do you get new patients from your Web site?

Actually, I do. Certainly, medical blogging, it’s still kind of an obscure thing. Blogging is still kind of an obscure thing in the mainstream.

Yeah, every story I read has to explain what blogging is.

I know what it is, you know what it is, but if you look at it in the mainstream generally, it’s still a little bit obscure. I think I attract some of the tech-savvy people who are obviously familiar with



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blogging and the Internet. They found me through my blog. Some people down from Manchester come down to see me because ... I think it's more because a lot of patients right now with this consumer-driven health care, they're kind of more self-directed. They get a lot of information on the Internet. And I think a lot of times they prefer a doctor that embraces that and acknowledges that a lot of people do get information on the Internet.

I noticed that at least the most recent posts, it's a lot of just posting articles without all that much commentary.

It's kind of modeled after [Kottke\[.com\]](#) and [InstaPundit\[.com\]](#). Just kind of a lot of posting articles and then the comments take effect. But then I do have some pieces where I write some opinions on what's going on. Or if I do write opinions, it's kind of like one-word commentary.

A lot of commentary can be just how you word the link.

Exactly. Before I used to write a lot more original pieces. It's just been so busy now.

How much time a day do you spend doing that?

One or two hours a day, normally. Before I see patients at 8:00, at lunchtime and when I come back. Sometimes less, sometimes more, depending on what's going on in the news.

Do you feel pressured to produce content?

No, not at all. I think once I do feel pressured, then I'll probably stop doing it. I read a lot of news anyway, and just linking to it and writing a little commentary really doesn't take that much more effort. I read so much news on Google News and news aggregators, especially current medical news. And it helps me keep up, to be honest. Without it, I probably wouldn't be as in tune with what's going on.

Do you learn things from your patients that you hadn't heard that maybe you'll go research and put online?

Absolutely. Especially with a lot of herbal and alternative medicines, because that's not something we're formally trained in.

Who do you see as your main audience? Is it patients, other doctors...

I'd say both. I touch on a lot of hot topics, a lot of frustration to the medical field — there's tort reform, escalation of malpractice premiums, lack of access, ER waits — and that touches a lot of nerves for a lot of physicians because these are certainly sensitive topics. A lot of docs feel the same way so it's an outlet for them to vent. I also attract a lot of lawyers because I post a lot on tort reform. It's a pretty contentious group that comments.

Do you try to stay away from overly technical articles?

Not necessarily. If I wanted to, I'll write something that was targeted to doctors. When I scan the news, it's basically whatever's interesting to me ... It could be some obscure medical news, it could be some bizarre medical error, it could be an interesting inspiring medical story, it could be a picture of something.

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