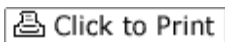


Advertisement



Powered by Clickability


[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Paging Dr. Blog: Online discourse raises questions

Ever wonder what doctors talk about among themselves?

You no longer need to be a fly on the wall of a doctors' lounge to find out. These days, you just need an Internet connection: Doctors increasingly are telling all — though sometimes behind a veil of anonymity and altered facts — in the blogosphere.

About 1% of all blogs deal with health, according to a 2006 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Many are by consumers writing about their own health issues, but "the numbers of health care providers who are blogging is steadily growing," says Fard Johnmar, founder of Envision Solutions, a New York health care marketing firm.

Some doctor blogs are intended for the broader public. But many, especially those by anonymous writers, feature doctors venting — about patients, hospitals, insurers and malpractice lawyers — to each other. Others dissect health news or health policy debates, minus the usual stuffiness of medical journals.

The blogs often make compelling reading:

- Val Jones, senior medical director of the new [Revolution Health site](#), recently blogged about a woman who stayed for weeks, 24/7, by the bedside of her comatose, severely brain-damaged mother. One day, the daughter finally decided to go out for lunch. A new attending physician, a "bit of a cowboy," came in, pronounced the mother hopeless and "turned off the machine." The daughter returned, learned what had happened and "fell to the ground and screamed," Jones wrote. "That scream still haunts me."

- Nicholas Genes, a New York City emergency room physician, wrote recently ([blogborygmi.blogspot.com](#)) about a stroke patient with a "lopsided smile," treated in the ER with the clot-busting drug tPA: "I wheeled her out of the department, into the elevator, and we glided up to the unit. Her family members rode along, silently. The elevator doors opened, and the neuro resident greeted us. I handed over her chart and said goodbye to the patient. Her family thanked me, and she acknowledged me — with a bright, symmetric smile."

Such stories, of course, raise a question: Should we all worry that our doctors are blogging about us — and potentially violating our privacy?

"The details are always, always, obscured," says Genes, who organizes a weekly sampling of medical blogs, called Grand Rounds, hosted by a different blogger each week. "If someone is coming in with a bleeding finger, it's going to become a toe."

Patient genders, ages, locations and timing — whether an incident happened last week or last year — also are commonly obscured, medical bloggers say.

Advertisement

In honor of
**National
 Military
 Appreciation
 Month,**
Military Times
 has a special
 online section

**SALUTE
 THE
 TROOPS**

www.militarytimes.com

"No personal information about any patient whatsoever" is revealed, says Jones.

But Len Lichtenfeld, deputy chief medical officer for the American Cancer Society, says he avoids discussing patients (except for public figures such as Elizabeth Edwards) at " [Doctor Len's Cancer Blog](#)" and worries a bit about storytelling bloggers: "There will be a problem eventually" with some violation of patient privacy, he predicts.

For now, readers should assume that many blogs telling patient stories are "highly fictionalized," Johnmar says. (It's a "good thing," he adds.)

But that raises another question: Can you trust the medical information in these blogs — especially those written anonymously?


Many carry disclaimers, saying that they should not be considered a source of medical advice.

Pew researcher Susannah Fox says the blogs can be informative — as long as readers keep in mind that "there's a difference between a conversation in a clinical setting and a conversation at a cocktail party."

Genes says there may be better places for patients to get information, but "patients can certainly benefit from knowing more about doctors' mind-sets."

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/painter/2007-05-13-doctor-blog_N.htm

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.

Sponsored Links

AARP & The Hartford Auto Ins Quotes

Over 50? Save \$303 On Auto Insurance. Fast, no-hassle claims with AARP
aarp.thehartford.com

Mortgage Rates at 3.0% - Save Thousands

\$150,000 loan for \$391/month - refinance, home equity and purchase.
refinance.leadsteps.com

Cross Atlantic Commodities: OTCBB: CXAC

Publicly traded commodity products.
www.crossatlanticcommodities.com

[Get listed here](#)