

Social media... should pediatricians be influencers?

At present, in a world where everything is influenced by social media, pediatricians cannot overlook this reality.

The study by Lamas et al. describes an approach on how to manage social media as a communication strategy with patients who are not at an office or point of care.

They propose that health care providers who decide to venture into the development of a professional digital identity should take certain precautions concerning their professional image, as well as the type of information they would like to disseminate. Therefore, the main recommendation can be summarized as follows: it is necessary to know how social media works and how to protect our digital reputation.¹

Social media can be considered one of the most innovative yet disruptive market forces that has emerged in recent times.

Health care does not escape this definition, as social media in the medical field can help patients become familiar with their clinical conditions. It has been described that in the most socially vulnerable populations, it would facilitate access to health information.^{2,3}

It could be said that if a company does not have online presence, "it does not exist". The population has turned to social media not only to search for general information about products and services, but also about health issues. Pediatricians cannot ignore the exponential growth of social network activities, not only from a commercial but also from an academic standpoint. It is estimated that 72% of the population participates in at least one social media, so we must acknowledge that these technologies have made it possible to create and develop "online communities" where people come together to share ideas, problems, and solutions.⁴

That is why our patients, and their caregivers use them on a daily basis; so, it is not surprising that some health care providers are willing to share information for patients on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and on one of the fastest-growing social media platforms, TikTok.

In the physician-patient relationship established in face-to-face care delivery, the health care provider has the ability to connect

with patients and their health status. This skill or competence is built and developed over time. Social media do not enable this kind of interaction; instead, many of the opposite traits, in which direct communication fails, are encouraged. Therefore, it is understandable that health care providers are reluctant to use social media since there is not a safe communication environment and roles are intermingled; it is an open discussion in which the value of face-to-face conversation as well as the expertise of the health care provider are overlooked.⁵ However, social media can be key in the care of patients as they offer tools to provide virtual health services where patients can participate more actively, and are empowered by becoming more involved in their health care decisions.⁶

In response to the use of social networks by professionals, a new concept has come up in recent years. It is called "e-professionalism" and is defined as "*the attitudes and behaviors that reflect traditional professionalism paradigms, but are manifested through digital media*". A recent review, that included 88 studies on e-professionalism, disclosed that there are benefits to using social media, such as the creation of networks to foster professional collaboration, continuing education, and patient education on health related issues. However, there are threats. such as the lack of accountability for shared information and its potential consequences, the risk of affecting the physician-patient relationship in terms of confidentiality, the loss of professional boundaries since "we are all equal" in social media, and an unprofessional behavior and the legal consequences associated with the performance of health care providers in social media.⁷

In short, there is a growing trend that encourages health care providers to use social media to interact with and provide information to patients, since it is a tool that is widely used and offers a space to establish a direct communication without intermediaries. Faced with this reality, it is important to also consider potential risks.⁸

At a worldwide level, several scientific and academic societies propose guidelines and protocols with recommendations for their correct use, aligned with the work of Lamas et al.

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