

# THE FACEBOOK FRONTIER

## *Compelling Social Media Can Transform Health Dialogue*



Every 60 seconds:

- Facebook users post 695,000 status updates
- YouTube broadcasters upload 600 new videos
- Photographers — amateur and professional — share 6,600 photos on Flickr
- iPhone owners download 13,000 new apps for their smart phones
- Twitter types send 98,000

“tweets”

Social media is already ubiquitous. Whether you are a 20-something connecting with college friends and finding tonight’s happy hour or a 70-year-old looking at photos of her grandchildren, you are part of the Facebook and social media revolution. Like it or not, most people are. In fact, if Facebook were a country it would be the world’s third largest, according to the Mayo Clinic, a health care pioneer on social media’s rapidly expanding frontier.

“At its heart, digital media is about people, it is about relationships, and it is about communication,” writes Howard Luks, MD, a member of the External Advisory Board for the Mayo Clinic Center for Social Media. “A social media presence is about educating, engaging and growing your audience.”

Many in Catholic health care have figured this out. According to CHA’s research, at least half of the nation’s 56 Catholic-sponsored health systems have a Facebook page. Many also have blogs, YouTube channels and Twitter feeds, as do a host of hospitals, which use social media to communicate with patients, build ties to the community, educate consumers and advocate for government policies that protect poor and vulnerable persons and the organizations serving them.

“The magic of Facebook is that it provides a forum for people to comment and get a response

back and bring others into the conversation,” said Peg Loyd, director of marketing and communications for St. Vincent Health System in Little Rock, Ark. “It has huge potential to provide that opportunity to share information about health care issues facing the nation and to get feedback directly from the people who are living it.”

Last summer St. Vincent wanted to promote the groundbreaking of a new family clinic and urgent care center to serve West Little Rock. System communicators paired Facebook with an ice cream van that moved around the city providing cool treats to local residents enduring the state’s hot and humid months. The van also educated consumers about the new facilities being built in a previously under-served area.

“The whole campaign really resonated and created a buzz,” Loyd said.

Facebook can also serve as an effective advocacy tool for reaching local and national leaders, as some Catholic-sponsored systems are learning.

“Everybody wants to have a voice with government; they feel qualified. When a trusted source says their voice is wanted and needed and will help them form thoughts, it makes an enormous difference,” said Eve Pidgeon, manager of corporate communications for Trinity Health in Novi, Mich.

In mid-November, Trinity used Facebook to collect more than 2,000 letters — mostly from system employees — urging Congress not to cut Medicare and Medicaid as part of the deficit reduction committee that was working at the time.

“The value of social media is to cross-promote traditional communication tactics. Social media is another tool in the toolbox to get out messages to a broader audience,” said Carol Tingwall, Trinity’s director of corporate communications and public relations.

In CHA’s case, Facebook can serve as a platform for educating Americans about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and prompting a dialogue

and exchange of ideas about the issues it raises.

Last year CHA's advocacy staff spent significant time seeking out people who have been helped by the Affordable Care Act. We found four very compelling stories that we told in the form of video vignettes, which are available at [www.YouTube.com/HealthReformWorks](http://www.YouTube.com/HealthReformWorks).

These stories have become an important part of Affordable Care Act education efforts and combatting inaccurate information about the nearly two-year-old law. Many organizations including CHA have found that to improve support of health reform, profiles of real people are more effective than fact-filled slide shows or wonky webinars.

As I draft this column, our YouTube channel has registered a few thousand views. Not bad, but also not the kind of critical mass we need if thousands or millions are to be reached with compelling messages from people like themselves.

We also need more of these stories — examples of patients helped by the Affordable Care Act, hospitals using innovation grants to improve care delivery and save system costs and other instances of health reform making a difference for providers and patients.

You can help ... if you have a health reform story to share, please let CHA know (you can email me directly at [jtieman@chausa.org](mailto:jtieman@chausa.org)). The Catholic health ministry is no doubt an excellent source for these powerful examples of the law working in real ways. Facebook is all about sharing stories — so when you help us find them, we have more compelling content to grab attention and make a difference.

Facebook and other social media are the next logical places to go as we broaden the reach of our mes-

sage. For most young people — and, in fact, a growing number of people in other age groups — Facebook and other networking sites are how people communicate with one another and obtain information they need.

If that's where so many people are going, Catholic health care should be there, especially as we defend health reform legislation.

When it comes to health reform and the personal issues it involves, "you are tapping into something that is easy to be passionate about and easy to have a two-way dialogue about," said Nick Dawson, administrative director of community engagement for Bon Secours Virginia Health System.

Dawson, described by his boss Peggy Moseley as "one of the nation's foremost experts on social media in health care," believes that advocacy and awareness campaigns have a natural home on Facebook, where people are already gathering and often want to find peers with whom they can communicate on issues of mutual interest.

"You have a potentially enormous audience — both Catholic and non-Catholic — that would be interested in this kind of health reform resource, a place where [social media users] are able to interact," Moseley said.

Traditional advocacy including lobbying and grassroots action are still as important as ever. Adding social media to the mix simply complements that work by expanding the reach of our message and amplifying the sound of our collective voice.

**JEFF TIEMAN** is senior director, health reform initiatives, Catholic Health Association, Washington, D.C. Write to him at [jtieman@chausa.org](mailto:jtieman@chausa.org).

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