

Letter to the Editor

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Social media and the future of medicine

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Dear Editor,

I read the recent editorial “Social media and the future of medicine” by David Noble and Deana McDonagh¹ with interest and agree that social media can provide opportunities to implement positive change in the healthcare system and offer new approaches to reduce healthcare costs.

Social media is the social interaction among people in which they create, share, or exchange information, and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Often, there is no guarantee with regard to the information content. To this effect, the quality of health information is of paramount importance. If social media provides false information, there is potential for the healthcare system to incur higher costs. Therefore, assessing the quality of healthcare information on social media is essential.

Current indicators for the quality of information on social media outlets include engines such as Google rank. While the Google rank system is important in determining which information will reach users, its efficacy in predicting the quality and accuracy of health information has yet to be made clear. Wikipedia is a website frequently accessed and ranks highly on Google searches. However, despite Wikipedia being a potentially important source of health information for patients, there is a risk of inaccurate and/or commercially biased information due to its crowd-edited nature.²

Expert-driven, popularity-driven, or heuristic-driven measures are required to adequately inform the public about the quality of healthcare information on social media. Such measures could include rankings on quality of content; health professional opinion; adequate length or duration;

public ratings; adequate titles, tags, and descriptions; a comprehensive narrative with evidence-based practices included in the video; rating of suitability as a teaching tool; technical quality; sufficient amounts of content to identify its objective; and viewership share.³ Other tools for evaluating the health information on the Internet include Alexa rank, Bomba index,⁴ Health on the Net (HON) quality label, and the Brief DISCERN scale score.⁵

At present, there are few reliable ways or indicators for assessing healthcare information on social media. It is unclear exactly what percentage of health information on the Internet is trustworthy. In view of the importance of health information in providing reliable information and generation of a comprehensive solution that is fair, effective, caring, and sustainable for the healthcare system, we must pay more attention to this field and introduce a reliable, standardised indicator for the use of health information.

Sincerely

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