

## Envision Solutions Spotlight™

The Emerging  
Healthcare Blogosphere:  
What Is It &  
Why Does It Matter?

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Justin Hall created the first Weblog or blog ([www.links.net](http://www.links.net)) while attending Swarthmore College.[1]<sup>1</sup> Over the last 12 years, blogs have become one of the most popular and prominent features of the Internet. Each day, thousands of people join the millions strong global community of blog authors or bloggers.<sup>2</sup>

Members of the diverse and ever-changing “blogosphere” write about a variety of topics, including fashion, popular culture, politics and communications.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blogs are regularly updated Web sites that contain an archive of content organized in reverse chronological order.[2]

<sup>2</sup> As of February 2006, the search firm Technorati reported that it was tracking more than 27 million blogs.[3]

<sup>3</sup> Writer William Quick coined the term “blogosphere” on his blog *Daily Pundit* ([www.dailypundit.com](http://www.dailypundit.com)) in early 2002.[4]

Some are also writing about healthcare. For example, between February and March 2006, 1,046,148 blog articles, or posts, mentioned cancer.[5]

While healthcare is a popular subject, until about 2002, few people blogged exclusively about this topic. However, as blogging has become increasingly popular the numbers of healthcare bloggers have increased. Today, there is a growing and vibrant community (or “healthcare blogosphere”) of physicians, health policy experts, communicators and others writing about healthcare on a regular basis.

Despite their small numbers, healthcare bloggers are starting to have an impact. For example, since May 2005, Laura Landro of the *Wall Street Journal*, has written three articles focusing on

healthcare blogs.[6-8]

As the healthcare blogosphere has grown in size and influence, some have begun to ask questions about its potential impact. Some of the most important include:

- Should I believe the hype about healthcare blogs? Aren't they just a passing fad?
- Are healthcare blogs filled with misinformation?
- Who is blogging about healthcare and why?
- Who are the most prominent healthcare bloggers?
- Will healthcare blogs affect patient care, health policy and medical education?
- How are people using the information in healthcare blogs?
- Why have hospitals, biotech firms, pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers, managed care companies and other healthcare organizations been so slow to embrace blogging?
- What are the reasons *not* to start a blog?
- How can I learn about and keep track of the healthcare blogosphere?
- How do I start a healthcare blog?

- What are blogging and marketing experts saying about healthcare blogs?

This report provides answers to all of these questions. It will help readers:

- **Learn** about the healthcare blogosphere and why it is important
- **Make an informed decision** about whether or not to start a healthcare blog
- **Address misconceptions** about healthcare blogs
- **Learn how** to start a personal, corporate or non-profit healthcare blog

## How To Use This Report

Following are some suggestions for how readers can get the most from this report.

Those **new to blogs** should read:

- Appendix I: Blogging Glossary
- Appendix II: Blogging Tips and Tools

Those seeking to learn **why healthcare blogs are important** should read:

- Part I: Why Healthcare Blogs Matter

Those looking for information **about the most prolific healthcare bloggers** should read:

- Patient Blogs
- Healthcare Provider Blogs
- Healthcare Expert Blogs

Those wishing to learn why **healthcare organizations** have been **reluctant to join the blogosphere** and reasons why they may want to, should read:

- Healthcare Organizations and Blogs
- Healthcare Non-Profits and Blogs

Those looking for information about **influential healthcare bloggers** should read:

- Appendix IV: Influential Healthcare Blogs

Those seeking information about **how to track the healthcare blogosphere** should read:

- Appendix III: Tracking the Healthcare Blogosphere

#### **About “Voices From The Blogosphere”**

No comprehensive report on the healthcare blogosphere would be complete without commentary from bloggers. You will find insights on healthcare blogs from seven prominent marketers, educators, patients and others in special sections of this report titled, “Voices from the Blogosphere.”

## **Healthcare Blogging: Largely A US Phenomenon**

Currently, most healthcare bloggers are located in the United States. Because of this, Envision Solutions' analysis of healthcare blogging is largely U.S.-centric. However, this report includes a number of examples of blogs maintained outside the United States – primarily in Europe.

## **Contact Us With Questions Or Comments**

Should you have any questions or comments about this report, please contact us at [info@envisionsolutionsnow.com](mailto:info@envisionsolutionsnow.com).

# Part I: Why Healthcare Blogs Matter

## THE EVOLVING INTERNET AND HEALTHCARE

In July 2005, Harris Interactive released a poll indicating that 117 million Americans regularly turn to the Internet for healthcare information.[9]

This statistic suggests that the Web has had a significant impact on how people seek, consume and use healthcare information.

This chapter focuses on how the evolving Internet has influenced the healthcare provider-patient relationship. It is designed to help readers understand why healthcare blogs are influential despite their small numbers.

### The Evolving Internet:

#### From Web 1.0 To Web 2.0

In the fall of 2001, the dot-com bubble burst.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>4</sup> The dot-com bubble was a long-term, self-perpetuating increase in the stocks of Internet companies. The dot-com

the aftermath of this event, hundreds of companies within and without the Internet were forced to quickly adapt or close.

In addition, after the crash some dismissed the Internet as a passing fad. Others however, recognized that the dot-com crash presented numerous opportunities for the Web to evolve and influence people's lives in new and different ways.

Two of the companies that viewed this event as an opportunity were O'Reilly Media, Inc. and MediaLive International. These firms believed that the next version of the Internet would be highly decentralized. Rather than information flowing from a few sources, individuals would play

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bubble "burst" when the stock prices of these companies lost significant value.

a greater role in content creation and exchange.[10]

O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International created a concept, "Web 2.0," to describe how the Web had evolved. According to these companies, Web 1.0 was centralized and featured largely static content.

#### Key Characteristics Of Web 1.0

- **Centralized:** Large entities/influential individuals control content creation and are viewed as information authorities.
- **Static:** Once information is posted to the Internet, it is infrequently changed or updated (relative to today).

In contrast, Web 2.0 is a decentralized, dynamic environment. Most importantly, individuals shape the majority of content rather than authorities.

#### Key Characteristics Of Web 2.0

- **Decentralized:** Many individuals create and distribute content.
- **Many Paths:** People seek and receive information in various ways (Really Simple Syndication, search engines, etc.).<sup>5</sup>
- **Dynamic:** Information is not "sacred." Anyone can shape it to fit his or her point-of-view.
- **Collective Consciousness:** Web 2.0 shaped and perfected by many voices rather than information authorities.

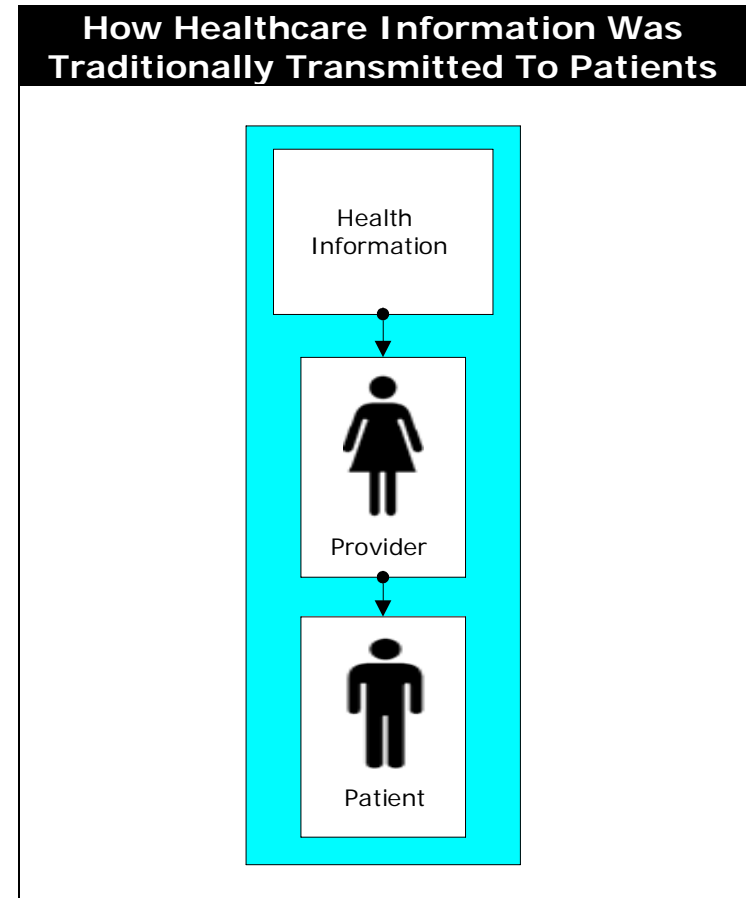
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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix I for a definition of Really Simple Syndication.

## Web 1.0 & Healthcare Information Exchange

The advent of Web 1.0 transformed the traditional ways that people received and consumed healthcare information. Before Web 1.0, healthcare providers were the primary keepers of medical information. Patients looked to their providers to educate them about their illnesses and how to manage them (see graphic at right).<sup>6</sup>

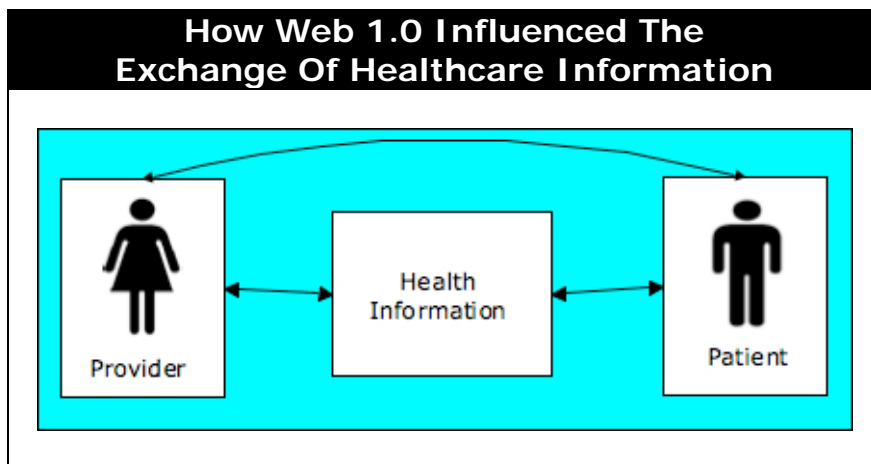
However, as use of the Internet became widespread, people increasingly turned to it for information about common and rare illnesses, medications, physicians, hospitals and other topics.



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<sup>6</sup> Patients also turned to family, peers, medical societies and government. However, healthcare providers were their primary information source.

As patients began seeking information from the Internet, their interactions with healthcare providers changed. Rather than having a superior-subordinate relationship, patients and medical professionals became partners. Patients would bring content they found on the Internet to their providers for discussion and clarification.[11] Providers also shared medical information they found on the Web with patients (see graphic below).



### Healthcare Information Exchange & Web 2.0

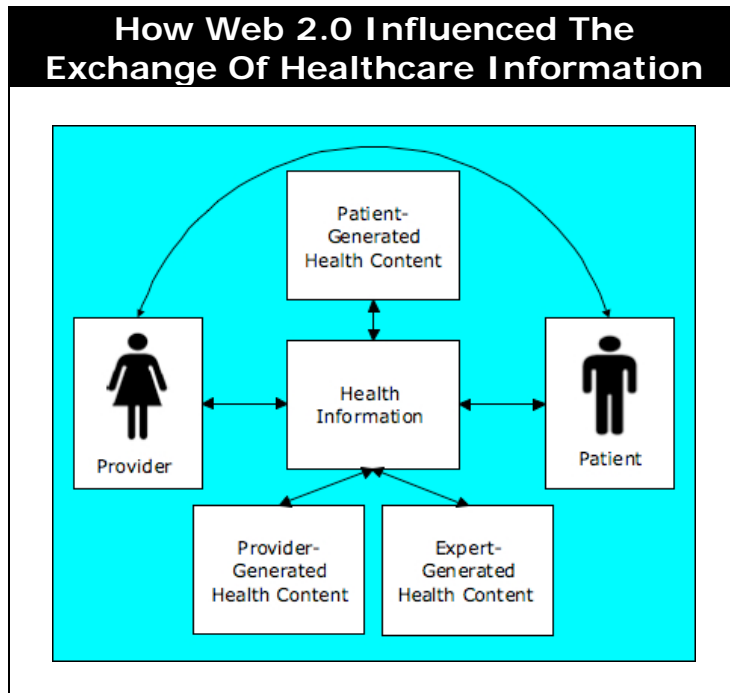
The advent of Web 2.0 has the potential to further transform how providers and patients seek and exchange healthcare information. Currently, individuals are no longer passively consuming information. Instead, they are actively creating content and shaping its interpretation.

In Web 1.0, people primarily received information from a few authoritative sources such as Web sites created by media and medical journals. With the exception of on-line bulletin boards or forums, people rarely relied on medical content created by laypersons.

Web 2.0 has greatly expanded our ability to create and find consumer-generated healthcare content. For example, major search engines like Yahoo! and Google regularly index information

published by healthcare providers, patients, experts and others on blogs. As a result, blog-generated content quickly becomes part of the available pool of healthcare information. Medical professionals and laypersons encounter this information when searching online for content.

For example, content published on Dr. Ves Dimov's Weblog, *Clinical Cases and Images Blog* (<http://clinicalcases.blogspot.com>), is regularly accessed by physicians and has influenced treatment practices. Dr. Dimov's blog provides physicians with in-depth guidance on numerous medical procedures such as x-ray interpretation. His Web site has become a valuable resource for physicians seeking information that is not generally available in textbooks. [12]



Today, consumer-generated content is influencing how providers and patients find, consume and share healthcare information (see graphic to the left).

Despite its growing influence, the healthcare Web 2.0 is still far behind other areas of the new Internet. For example, healthcare blogs made up

a tiny proportion of the 27.2 million blogs Technorati was tracking in February 2006.[3]

In addition, many patients still heavily rely on a Web 1.0 technology, healthcare online bulletin boards. Bulletin boards remain popular because patients using them may feel part of a vibrant community. Patients may also favor bulletin boards because they can quickly receive information tailored to their specific situation.

However, as the healthcare blogosphere expands it may start to significantly impact healthcare treatment, policy, communication and education. Some of the factors contributing to the growing influence of healthcare blogs are explored in the next chapter.

## WHY HEALTHCARE BLOGS MATTER

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Internet has transformed the way information is exchanged between healthcare providers and patients. Web 2.0 technologies like blogs have accelerated the pace of change as patients and providers have begun to contribute content to the available pool of healthcare information.

Blogs have other important implications for healthcare providers, laypersons, policymakers, corporations and government. Following is an overview of some the most important ways blogs may influence healthcare in the United States and around the world.

### *Consumer-Driven Healthcare*

Health policy experts, public officials and others have suggested that the structure of the United

States' health insurance system contributes to rising healthcare costs.

One reason for this is that individuals receiving treatment are largely unaware of the true costs of medications, procedures and other healthcare services.

<b>Key Ways Blogs May Impact Healthcare</b>
<b>Consumer-Driven Healthcare</b>
<p>Blogs may improve people's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Understanding</b> of disease via information exchange and dialogue with "citizen medical experts."</li><li>• <b>Understanding</b> of how significant trends (Health Savings Accounts, Medicare Part D) will affect them.</li></ul>

In general, individuals with health insurance in the United States pay a small co-pay for medical care. Employers and government pay for the bulk of medications, procedures and other healthcare services.

To decrease the utilization of healthcare resources, managed care organizations, government and corporations have begun to shift medical costs to individuals. One popular cost-shifting strategy involves having patients pay higher co-pays for expensive medications.

Another involves encouraging people to enroll in defined-contribution plans (DCPs), now commonly referred to as Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). Those with HSAs place money into an account that they can withdraw from to pay for certain medical expenses.

These cost-shifting techniques are ushering in an era of “consumer-driven healthcare.”

Increasingly, individuals are being asked to play a greater role in healthcare management and payment. However, becoming an effective “consumer” of healthcare requires knowledge and information that most people lack.

Blogs have the potential to become a valuable resource for individuals assuming more responsibility for their healthcare resources. For example, blogs written by patients and medical professionals can provide information on how to manage an illness efficiently and cost-effectively. In addition, by writing (or “posting”) comments to a blog, people can get answers to questions about how to care for themselves or others.

There is some evidence that patient blogs are already becoming an important resource. Over the past several years, individuals with conditions like diabetes and cancer have formed large and vibrant blogging communities.[8] These "citizen medical experts" provide information on common and rare illnesses and advice about how to cope.

Blogs written by healthcare providers (both practicing and in training) are also becoming increasingly popular and useful. One example is *Over My Med Body* ([www.grahamazon.com](http://www.grahamazon.com)), a prominent blog written by Graham Walker a medical student at Stanford University.

Noticing that older Americans were having trouble navigating a Web-based enrollment form for Medicare Part D, Walker developed a detailed

explanation of the process.[13]<sup>7</sup> (View Walker's tool at <http://www.grahamazon.com/2005/11/medicare-prescription-drug-calculator-tutorial>.)

### *Treatment Practices*

For much of medical history, people believed that medical decision-making was an efficient and effective process.[14] Conventional wisdom held that patients were well-served by physicians practicing medicine based on knowledge, training, judgment and artistry.[14] This perception of physician treatment practices persisted until the early 1970s when research demonstrated that there were wide variations in medical treatment.[14] For example, one trial found that physicians were performing a significant number

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<sup>7</sup> Medicare Part D is a new voluntary program for individuals eligible for Medicare. People in the program can access prescription medications at reduced prices.

of unnecessary coronary angiography procedures. In some cases, doctors prescribed this treatment for patients who had not undergone exercise testing and who did not have angina (chest pain occurring when the heart does not receive enough oxygen).[15]

By the mid-1980s, evidence was building that many common medical practices were ineffective and that few were based on information garnered from clinical trials.[14] Concerns about this issue and mounting healthcare costs prompted efforts to standardize medical practice. One strategy was to use evidence from medical studies and other sources to improve decision-making. This approach came to be known as “evidence-based medicine” in the early 1990s.[16]

Over the past twenty years, evidence-based medicine has significantly influenced treatment practices. For example, government, medical societies and managed care organizations have developed numerous guidelines in an effort to standardize patient care.

While evidence-based medicine is well accepted, barriers to its adoption remain. Some of the most significant include:

- **Patient-Provider Relationship:** Patients expect providers to treat them as individuals. Providers comply by relying on their experience with patients and others with similar conditions rather than treatment guidelines.[17]

- **Lack Of Knowledge:** Many providers are unaware that guidelines exist.[17]
- **Guidelines Are Unwieldy:** Providers cannot easily reference guidelines because many are not available electronically.[17]
- **Many Guidelines Are Subjective:** Many guidelines are developed subjectively (i.e., via a consensus of experts) rather than objectively (i.e., via the use of clinical trials). It is prohibitively expensive for guideline developers to conduct the clinical trials necessary to ground recommendations in quantitative evidence. This subjectivity allows more room for disagreement with medical guidelines.[17]

#### How Blogs May Impact Treatment Practices

Clearly, blogs cannot overcome all of the barriers to the adoption of evidence-based medicine.

However, because blogs foster collaboration among healthcare providers, they have the potential to positively impact treatment practices. Specifically, blogs can improve:

- **Adoption Of Best Practices:** One of the most significant obstacles to guideline adoption is the fact that many providers are not aware they exist. Blogs developed by providers or organizations can help by publicizing information about new and noteworthy guidelines. In addition, blogs can allow providers to discuss and debate medical recommendations. Giving guideline developers the ability to respond to criticism and publicize

recommendations via blogs may increase healthcare provider adoption of best practices.

<b>Key Ways Blogs May Impact Healthcare</b>	
<b>Treatment Practices</b>	
Blogs may improve the:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Adoption</b> of best-practices</li><li>• <b>Critique and analysis</b> of clinical trials and medical articles</li><li>• <b>Exchange of information</b> about new or difficult-to-treat illnesses</li><li>• <b>Communication</b> with patients</li></ul>	

- **Critique and Analysis:** Blogs can serve as a forum for healthcare providers and others to discuss and analyze new clinical trials and medical articles.[18]

- **Information Exchange:** Blogs can facilitate the exchange of information about new or difficult-to-treat illnesses. It can take months or years for information to appear in peer-reviewed journals about new diseases. Blogs can accelerate knowledge transfer and encourage collaboration between providers globally.
- **Communication With Patients:** Providers can use blogs to communicate with patients. For example, they can respond to patient questions by using examples from anonymous case studies.

In addition, patients may view providers with blogs as more accessible and willing to engage in substantive dialogue about important medical issues. As Dr. Kevin Pho, author of

the popular medical blog *Kevin, M.D.*, ([www.kevinmd.com/blog](http://www.kevinmd.com/blog)) has observed: "Some of my patients are aware of [my blog], and we discuss it during patient visits. Some patients have even found me via the blog and switched to me as their primary care physician. There seems to be a demand for physicians who understand the Internet's role in patient health information today." [19]

*Drug & Device Manufacturers;  
Managed Care Organizations; Hospitals; and  
Healthcare Non-Profits*

Over the past year, media, communications experts, bloggers and others have commented extensively on the benefits and drawbacks of blogs for corporations and other large

organizations. Microsoft, Macromedia and IBM are just a few of the companies that are using blogs to connect with customers, streamline internal communications, and respond to criticism. [20]

Blogs have also affected companies negatively. One significant example is the controversy over Dell's customer service. Blogger Jeff Jarvis decided to publish negative commentary about his experiences with the company on his blog, *Buzz Machine* ([www.buzzmachine.com](http://www.buzzmachine.com)).

Jarvis' complaints received a great deal of attention from his fellow bloggers and the media. In addition, according to an analysis conducted by Market Sentinel, Immediate Future and Onalytica,

**Key Ways Blogs May  
Impact Healthcare**

**Drug & Device Manufacturers;  
Managed Care Organizations;  
Hospitals; Healthcare Non-Profits**

Blogs may help these organizations:

- **Communicate** with key constituents (the public, thought leaders, donors, advocates, providers)
- **Ensure information** about the risks and benefits of medications and devices are clearly communicated
- **Quickly comment** on controversial issues or other topics
- **Improve** the public's understanding of how companies operate and the rationale for their policies
- **Improve** internal communication

Jarvis' blogging efforts had a negative impact on Dell's reputation.[21]

Healthcare blogs have not yet significantly influenced healthcare organizations. However, the growing strength of this communications medium demands that drug and device manufacturers, managed care organizations, hospitals, non-profits and others learn about, monitor and potentially participate in the healthcare blogosphere.

These organizations can use blogs to:

- **Transmit Accurate Medical Information:**  
Currently, the Internet is filled with inaccurate medical content. Healthcare organizations can help correct this by developing and

participating in blogs that provide correct healthcare information.

- **Provide Commentary:** Healthcare organizations can use blogs to comment and respond to controversial issues like drug pricing and direct-to-consumer advertising.
- **Improve Understanding:** Organizations can use blogs to improve the public's understanding of how they operate. Clear, consistent communication via blogs can also bolster or improve their reputation.

For example, Microsoft, long considered the "Evil Empire" of technology companies, has improved customer perceptions via blogs. Microsoft uses its blogs to explain policies, address concerns about its products and

develop better merchandise.[20]

- **Improve Internal Communications:** Large organizations are using blogs to improve internal communications and boost productivity.[20] Healthcare organizations can also benefit from blogs by using them to hone concepts, introduce new policies and communicate with key stakeholders.

For example, a European pharmaceutical company is currently using blog technology to streamline collaboration and improve internal communication.[22]

### *Healthcare Communication*

Healthcare media, marketers, public relations specialists and other communicators can also gain

from blogs. Some of the most important benefits include:

Key Ways Blogs May Impact Healthcare
<b>Healthcare Communication</b>
Blogs may help healthcare communicators:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Better</b> understand how people perceive healthcare products, services and issues</li><li>• <b>Provide</b> new channels to communicate about healthcare products and services</li><li>• <b>Improve</b> health promotion efforts by helping people learn new ways to prevent illness and overcome barriers to better health</li></ul>

- **Improved Understanding:** By monitoring and interacting with bloggers, communicators can gain a better understanding of how people perceive healthcare products, services and

issues.

For example, pharmaceutical marketers communicating about a new diabetes treatment monitored blogs and other consumer-generated media (i.e., on-line forums) for conversations about diabetes diets and medical treatments.

Using their research, the marketers developed a successful program that helped diabetics support their peers and access information.[23]

- **Provide New Communications Channels:** Blogs can provide healthcare communicators with new ways to reach consumers. For example, they can use blogs to inform constituents and other stakeholders about new

programs, products or services. However, to be effective, marketers must clearly communicate the purpose of the blog and be willing to moderate dialogue.

- **Aid Health Promotion Efforts:** Blogs can aid health promotion efforts by providing communicators with new and powerful ways to educate. For example, the March Of Dimes has launched a series of blogs ([www.shareyourstory.org](http://www.shareyourstory.org)) where people with babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit can share stories. Members of the blogging community learn about child rearing and get answers to questions about procedures their children are undergoing.

As this chapter demonstrates, blogs clearly have the potential to significantly impact healthcare

delivery, communication, and education. In part two of this report, you will find numerous examples of healthcare blogs created by providers, experts and patients. In addition, you will learn the reasons pharmaceutical/biotech companies, hospitals, medical device makers and healthcare non-profits have been reluctant to embrace blogs. We will examine the cons and pros of blogging and provide case studies of healthcare organizations' blogging efforts.

## VOICES FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE

**Steve Rubel | Blog: *Micro Persuasion***

**B.L. Ochman | Blog: *What's Next Blog***

*Steve Rubel and B.L. Ochman are two of the most well-respected and widely cited marketing experts in the world. Both Rubel and Ochman write closely watched blogs that provide insightful analysis of current and future blogging and Web 2.0 trends. Rubel writes *Micro Persuasion* ([www.micropersuasion.com](http://www.micropersuasion.com)) and Ochman authors the *What's Next Blog* ([www.whatsnextblog.com](http://www.whatsnextblog.com)). Following are their comments on the implications of blogs for the healthcare industry.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Rubel's interview previously appeared on *HealthCareVox*, ([www.healthcarevox.com](http://www.healthcarevox.com)) a blog focusing on healthcare marketing communications written by Envision Solutions' founder, Fard Johnmar. The following individuals contributed questions marked with an asterisk: John Cass, Backbone Media ([www.backbonemedia.com](http://www.backbonemedia.com)),

## Steve Rubel On Healthcare Blogging

**Q:** Blogs have clearly had a huge impact on numerous industries, including technology (Microsoft, Macromedia) and food (McDonald's). Do you think blogging has affected the healthcare industry in the same way? If not, why?

**A:** I don't think that blogging has impacted the healthcare industry significantly yet. However, I do think that we will see increased focus on the influence of healthcare blogs over the next months and years.

I will say that there are a lot of people blogging about healthcare – in general. Health is a topic that flows through many posts.

However, I haven't seen a huge amount of people

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Shahid Shah, Netspective ([www.netspective.com](http://www.netspective.com)) and Courtney Moore, Auburn University ([www.auburn.edu](http://www.auburn.edu)).

blogging about healthcare exclusively – with the exception of individuals writing about their experiences with illness. (I launched a blog ([www.skincancerblog.net](http://www.skincancerblog.net)) when I was diagnosed with skin cancer late last year, but I'm sorry to say I haven't been able to keep up with it as much as I'd like.)

I think that more people will be blogging about healthcare exclusively as the blogosphere expands. But right now, healthcare blogging is not as popular as some other areas.

**Q:** In your mind, what are the benefits of blogging for patients . . .

**A:** For patients it's about community, finding others out there just like you. Knowledge sharing and advocacy [are other areas]. If people feel they want to highlight a cause of some kind, they

can form a community. However, I haven't seen a lot of examples of this happening.

**Q:** . . . healthcare providers . . .

**A:** My brother is a physician and I've been trying to get him to blog! He hasn't bitten yet though!

I think the main benefit for physicians is business. Google is a great resource for patients trying to find out about physicians. If you can get in the top Google listings, that's great for your business.

So in all, marketing is huge. Knowledge sharing between physicians is another area where blogs could benefit doctors.

**Q:** . . . the pharmaceutical/biotech industry . . .

**A:** There are a lot of risks inherent in blogging for the pharmaceutical industry, given the fact that they are so heavily regulated. However, there are also a lot of benefits. For example, pharmaceutical companies could foster genuine dialogue about issues.

Pharmaceutical companies [do a lot to] help to alleviate pain (both physical and emotional). I think they could lead a dialogue or play host to a dialogue about [healthcare-related] topics.

Pharmaceutical companies could also become aggregators of healthcare information. They could host a blog that gathered information from blogs, news sources and other places that people could reference.

**Q:** . . . and government?

**A:** I'm going to answer that with one word: trust. Building trust with constituents is a big deal. For example, I think that blogs could help regulatory agencies like the [Food and Drug Administration] build a dialogue with people interested in issues the agency is dealing with.

**Q:** Why do you think the US pharmaceutical and biotech industries have been so slow to embrace blogging?

I think that regulation has a lot to do with it. The companies are nervous that if they talk about side effects, they will have problems. It's a scary thing for them. I think we'll need to see a few companies blogging successfully before others will get into the act.

**Q:** Can you think of other heavily regulated industries like pharma that are not as far behind

on blogging?\*

**A:** I don't know of any other companies in heavily regulated industries that are blogging. What's ironic though is that politicians are blogging and they regulate all of these industries!

**Q:** How would you help a pharma company build relevant content on a blog?\*

**A:** I think it depends on the situation, but – conceptually speaking – there are a few approaches one could take. One would be to aggregate information about healthcare on a blog. That's one approach. I have two questions though: Can people provide feedback? How do companies deal with comments?

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\* Question written by Shahid Shah, Netspective.

\* Question written by John Cass, Backbone Media.

Companies could also host blogs written by patients. For example, they could recruit five patients that have been helped by one of their therapies and they could blog. However, I'd have to talk to some lawyers about the legal aspects of this.

[Off the subject of blogging], podcasting [MP3 recordings developed for replay on iPods] could be another way to go. There could be sponsored podcasts by patients that could be underwritten by a pharmaceutical company.

**Q:** Suw Charman, a blogging expert based in Europe, wrote a case study in 2005 on a "Dark Blog" a European pharmaceutical company launched to improve internal communications, collaboration and productivity.[22] Given the results of this case study, do you think blogs could help improve patient care, policymaking and

other activities in the same way?

**A:** I think that this case study demonstrates that blogs can be a tremendous knowledge-sharing tool. However, you need to be prepared to deal with the possibility that information could go “over the wall.” There needs to be a safety net in place to prevent [confidential information] from being released.

**Q:** Are there any healthcare bloggers you are aware of that have influenced the activities of pharmaceutical companies or other players in the healthcare field?

**A:** Not that I am aware of, but I haven’t studied it that closely.

**Q:** According to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 85% of people polled believe word of

mouth communication is credible compared to 70% who feel advertising and public relations are. How would the added credibility of word of mouth marketing affect the healthcare industry and how it does business?\*

**A:** Those data points are consistent with the Edelman Trust Barometer, which recognized that the vast majority of people trust people like themselves.<sup>9</sup> What healthcare companies have to do is to try to facilitate trust. Gather up a group of people and empower them to help build conversations around issues. My major piece of advice is this: be a facilitator not a communicator.

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\* Question written by Courtney Moore, Auburn University.

<sup>9</sup> The Edelman Trust Barometer is an annual survey fielded by the independent public relations agency Edelman. This global survey polls 2,000 opinion leaders in 11 countries about how much they trust individuals, corporations, media and other sources of information.

Blogging is about matchmaking and social networking. What could be successful is having [companies sponsor blogs, like they once sponsored television programs]. I'm not saying that you should abandon marketing, but you don't push it so much.

**Q.** Why do you think healthcare marketers should care about blogging?

**A:** I think that healthcare marketers should care about all social media technologies: social tagging, podcasting, video blogging and [regular] blogging. Consumers are going to these media sources for advice and counsel. Healthcare marketers have to contend with this and figure out how to deal with it.

**Q:** Are healthcare marketers aware of social networking technologies or are they behind the

curve?

**A:** I think that healthcare marketers are aware of these technologies, but they are trying to figure out how to act given all of the regulations faced by healthcare companies.

### **B.L. Ochman On Healthcare Blogging**

**Q:** What is your impression of the state of the healthcare blogosphere (patient blogs, non-profit blogs and industry) -- or lack there of?

**A:** You know, I don't follow healthcare blogging all that closely, so I can only give my general opinion. Overall, I have seen a number of patient and physician blogs that are very informative.

Steve Rubel's skin cancer blog

([www.skincancerblog.net](http://www.skincancerblog.net)) is one from a popular

blogger with good credibility. *Critical Condition* ([www.medicalcrises.blogspot.com](http://www.medicalcrises.blogspot.com)) is an interesting physician blog. The *Cheerful Oncologist* (<http://thecheerfuloncologist.blogspot.com>) is another [good blog written by a physician].

The problem with most of the patient and physician health blogs I have seen is that the writers don't know how to build an audience for the blogs. Therefore they aren't getting the kind of attention they could.

**Q:** What would be your advice to any healthcare non-profit looking to use the blogosphere to raise funds or increase their visibility?

**A:** Talk to a consultant, like me, who really knows the blogosphere. Consultants can help

create a blog on topics of real interest, show how it can be sustained, and build an audience.

**Q:** Do you believe healthcare blogs started by patients are useful?

**A:** Absolutely. Patients willing to share their experience and knowledge with other patients are certainly more credible than pharmaceutical companies.

**Q:** What is your advice to pharmaceutical/biotech/medical device companies seeing to enter the blogosphere?

**A:** I consult to corporations, and I'd suggest that they talk to me before they start blogging. "Corporate speak" has no place in the blog world, nor does a blog that is vetted by

lawyers or flaks [or public relations professionals].

**Q:** Do you have any general comments on this issue?

**A:** Pharmaceutical companies have public images somewhere below snakes. So, before one enters the blogosphere, it had better be ready for genuine dialog, able to accept criticism and willing to share good and bad news.

## Part II: Healthcare Blogs At Work

## PATIENT BLOGS

Since the advent of the Internet, people coping with illness have turned to it for advice and information. As blogs became increasingly popular, some patients began to use them to communicate with others about their illness.

In this chapter, we examine the different types of patient blogs and outline their benefits.

### Types Of Patient Blogs

The most common and “classic” form of patient blog is the “diary blog.” Patients create these Weblogs to share their experience and knowledge with others. However, with the growth of the healthcare blogosphere in recent years, the patient blogging “Diaspora” has significantly expanded. Now, there are many different types of patient blogs, including “thought leader” blogs,

which are developed by people seeking to educate their peers. Following is an overview of common patient blog sub-types.

- **“Diary” Patient Blogs:** These are blogs created by patients wishing to share their daily experiences with an illness. Most times, a patient is motivated to start a blog on his or her own. In other instances, physicians have asked patients to integrate blogging into their therapy.

For example, a physician treating a patient recently diagnosed with cancer encouraged him to blog because he could “basically creat[e] his own virtual therapy . . . [at his] own pace.” [24]

### Blogging Tips

Following are some questions patients should answer before they start a blog.

- **Why are you blogging?** People with medical conditions blog for many reasons. Some want to share their experiences with others. Others wish to educate. Before starting a blog carefully consider why you want one.
- **Can you handle the commitment?** You must be willing to dedicate several hours each week to your blog if you want it to be successful. If you do not have the time or energy to blog, you may not want to start one.
- **Can you be accurate?** Others may start to rely on your blog for information about how to manage their condition. While a blog is not a substitute for professional medical advice, it must be accurate. Be sure to cite your sources and highlight discrepancies when, and if they occur.

- **Patient “Thought Leader” Blogs:** Patients develop these blogs to help them cope with illness *and* provide insight and information to others. Amy Tenderich’s blog, *Diabetes Mine* ([www.diabetesmine.com](http://www.diabetesmine.com)), is one example of a patient thought leader blog. Tenderich decided to write the blog to help her fellow diabetics better understand the wealth of information on the Internet. (Please see the “Voices from the Blogosphere” feature after this chapter to read Envision Solutions’ interview with Tenderich.)
- **Family/Friend/Caregiver Blogs:** These are blogs created by family members, friends or caregivers to support someone with an illness. One example of a caregiver blog is *Autism Land* ([www.kristinachew.com](http://www.kristinachew.com)), which was developed by the mother of an autistic child.

- **Advocate/Support Blogs:** Individuals or groups advocating for a cause or helping a patient generally create advocate blogs.

One prominent example of an advocate blog is *Drisana Blog* (<http://drisana.blog.com>), a short-lived Weblog created by Diane Dick. She created the blog to put pressure an insurance company, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, to pay for surgery to correct her grandson's chest deformity (pectus carinatum). After a two-month blogging and media outreach campaign, the insurance company decided to pay for the surgery.

- **Celebrity Health Blogs:** These are blogs created by celebrities to raise awareness about an illness or to encourage changes in behavior (e.g., smoking cessation). Yahoo! Health and

the American Cancer Society (ACS) created a number of celebrity blogs for the *Blog For Hope* campaign (<http://blogs.health.yahoo.com/blog-for-hope>). Yahoo! and the ACS developed this 30-day event to raise awareness of the importance of cancer prevention and early detection.

### **Benefits Of Patient Blogs**

There are numerous benefits of patient blogs. Some of the most important include:

- **Patient Blogs Are An Information Source:** Blog postings are regularly indexed by the major search engines (Google, Yahoo!, MSN, etc.). Given this, people can readily find first-hand information about how to cope with illness on patient blogs.

- **Patient Blogs Are Therapeutic:** An America Online survey conducted in 2005 indicated that half of all bloggers polled viewed blogging as a therapeutic activity.[24] Patients newly diagnosed with a condition are often overwhelmed and confused. Blogging can empower patients and help them come to terms with their illness.
- **Patient Blogs Provide Support:** Blogs developed by patient groups or advocates can provide much-needed support. These blogs can help patients or caregivers feel connected to a larger community of people coping with disease.
- **Patient Blogs Can Influence:** As Diane Dick's blog demonstrates, patient blogs can

shape corporate policy by bringing public and media pressure on an organization.

### Examples Of Patient Blogs

Following are examples of patient blogs organized by the sub-types outlined above.

#### "Diary" Patient Blogs

- **A Difficult Patient**  
A blog written by a patient to close the doctor-patient communication gap.  
(<http://www.xanga.com/difficultpt>)
- **Journey Through Breast Cancer**  
A blog written by a woman with breast cancer and three children.  
(<http://fightingbreastcancer.blogspot.com>)
- **Bionic Ear Blog**  
A blog written by a deaf person.  
(<http://www.meryl.net/ci/>)

### Patient "Thought Leader" Blogs

- **Diabetes Mine**  
A blog designed to help diabetics cope with the condition and better understand diabetes-related medical information.  
([www.diabetesmine.com](http://www.diabetesmine.com))
- **Prostate-Help**  
A collection of prostate cancer patient blogs that provide the latest information on the illness.  
([www.prostate-help.blogs.com/prostatehelp](http://www.prostate-help.blogs.com/prostatehelp))
- **The Cancer Blog**  
A compendium of blogs featuring comprehensive information on cancer diagnosis, treatment and medical news.  
([www.thecancerblog.com](http://www.thecancerblog.com))
- **CrazyMeds**  
A blog providing information about the benefits and drawbacks of psychiatric medications from a patient perspective.  
([www.crazymeds.org](http://www.crazymeds.org))

### Family/Friend/Caregiver Blogs

- **Autismland**  
A blog written by the mother of a child with autism.  
([www.kristinachew.com](http://www.kristinachew.com))
- **My Dad Has Cancer**  
A blog authored by a woman caring for her father who has non-small cell lung cancer.  
(<http://mydadhascancer.blogspot.com>)

### Advocate/Support Blogs

- **Living With Chronic Illness And Pain**  
A group of blogs authored by people suffering from pain or a chronic illness.  
([www.xanga.com/groups/group.aspx?id=31229](http://www.xanga.com/groups/group.aspx?id=31229))
- **The Big Fat Blog**  
A blog developed for overweight people.  
([www.bigfatblog.com](http://www.bigfatblog.com))

### Celebrity Health Blogs

- **Blog For Hope!**  
A group of blogs written by celebrities and public figures about cancer prevention sponsored by Yahoo! Health and the American Cancer Society.  
(<http://blogs.health.yahoo.com/blog-for-hope>)
- **Fabulous At 50**  
A blog developed by the American Cancer Society featuring commentary by prominent politicians, community leaders and others on the importance of colon cancer screening.  
([http://community.acsevents.org/site/PageServer?pagename=C\\_EA\\_faf06\\_home&JServSessionIdr011=mdyya9jlp2.app5a](http://community.acsevents.org/site/PageServer?pagename=C_EA_faf06_home&JServSessionIdr011=mdyya9jlp2.app5a))

## VOICES FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE

### **Amy Tenderich | Blog: Diabetes Mine**

*At the age of 37, Amy Tenderich was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes or Latent Autoimmune Diabetes in Adults. Wanting to learn more about her illness, Tenderich turned to the Internet. However, she was quickly overwhelmed by the amount and variety of diabetes-related news and information she found on the Web.*

*18 months after her diagnosis, Tenderich decided to start a blog, Diabetes Mine ([www.diabetesmine.com](http://www.diabetesmine.com)), to help her fellow diabetics better understand and cope with the condition. Following is commentary from Tenderich on why blogging is important to her.*

**Q:** Why did you start blogging?

**A:** I started my blog because I wanted to help others who might be feeling overwhelmed by all of the news and information on diabetes on the Internet. I once did an Internet search on the term “diabetes foot care” and got 2 million hits! I kid you not!

I decided that blogging would be a good way to filter all of this information, share my personal experiences and communicate with others touched by this illness.

**Q:** What do you hope to achieve with your blog?

**A:** My main goal is to have a voice within the diabetes community. I want to let people know

that it is possible to live and prosper with diabetes.

**Q:** How does blogging help you cope with diabetes?

The truth is: I hate having diabetes. The only way I know of to cope is to write about it. After all, I write for a living. The blog has really helped me to connect with people – to not feel isolated and alone.

**Q:** How has blogging changed your relationship with your healthcare providers?

**A:** For me, blogging has confirmed the notion that doctors don't know everything. I feel that other diabetics have been the best source of information about how to manage my condition.

I'm happy to share some of the knowledge I've learned with others visiting my site.

**Q:** Do you have any words of wisdom for others coping with illness thinking about starting their own blogs?

**A:** I think that blogging can help a person stay connected and cope with their illness. However, I have to warn that keeping a blog fresh over time is no small undertaking. But, if you stick with it blogging can provide lots of personal and emotional rewards.

## HEALTHCARE PROVIDER BLOGS

In February 2002, an Ohio-based physician, who uses the pseudonym Sydney Smith, became one of the first healthcare providers in the United States to start a blog.<sup>10</sup> Smith named her Weblog *Medpundit* (<http://medpundit.blogspot.com>), a play on University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds' popular blog, *Instapundit* ([www.instapundit.com](http://www.instapundit.com)). [25]

Recalling what motivated her to start her blog, Smith said: "When reading blogs like *Instapundit* I "started to think, there's nothing like that for medicine, that takes the news stories you read . . . and interprets them or gives an opinion about them." [25]

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<sup>10</sup> David Theige, MD, an internal medicine physician based in North Dakota, is the author of the first medical blog, *MedEd News* (<http://medednews.weblogger.com>).

Today, Smith's Weblog is one of the most popular and well-regarded physician blogs in the healthcare blogosphere. In addition, hundreds of nurses, physicians, pharmacists and others around the world have launched Weblogs.

In this chapter, you will find:

- An analysis of why healthcare providers blog
- An overview of the benefits of healthcare provider blogs
- Examples of healthcare provider blogs
- Tips for healthcare providers thinking about starting a blog

## Why Do Healthcare Providers Blog?

Healthcare providers maintain blogs for a variety of reasons. Some of the most common include:

- **To Share Experiences:** Some healthcare providers use their blogs to share their day-to-day experiences and commune with peers. These “diary” blogs are the most common type of medical professional Weblog.

In these blogs, healthcare providers share details of encounters with patients, frustration with paperwork and even details about their personal lives. Those maintaining diary blogs sometimes write under a pseudonym to protect their identity. In addition, they are careful not to reveal the personal details of patients they serve.

One popular diary blog, *Intueri: To Contemplate* ([www.intueri.org](http://www.intueri.org)), is written by “Maria,” a psychiatry resident based in Seattle Washington. She uses her blog to detail the events of her day, provide commentary on a book she is reading or recount her experiences with patients.

For example, in one blog post she wrote about how she retreated to a quiet stairwell to escape the hustle and bustle of the hospital, “the malfunctioning IVs, the flushing toilets, the retching, or crying, or snoring, or yelling patients . . .”[26]

Another widely read diary blog, *Neonatal Doc* (<http://neonataldoc.blogspot.com>), is written by a neonatologist based in the Midwest. In one January 2006 post, he shared the mixed

### Blogging Tips

Following are some tips for healthcare providers thinking about starting a blog.

- **Only blog if you have time.** Blogs require significant commitment to maintain and grow.
- **Read other blogs.** Read blogs written by healthcare providers to learn about different blogging styles and perspectives.
- **Protect patient confidentiality and ensure accuracy.** Be sure to preserve patient privacy and strive for accuracy – cite all sources.
- **Tell your employer.** If you blog under your real name, tell your employer that you are blogging and get their support. There has been at least one instance where a healthcare provider's blog was shut down because his employer did not sanction his activity.[27]

feelings he sometimes has for his patients and their families. He writes: "Does anyone else share the dichotomy of feelings I have towards my patients and their families? On the one hand, I feel tremendous sympathy for them . . . on the other hand . . . I feel tremendous frustration with some of them . . . I want to respect everyone, but some people sure make it hard." [28]

- **To Provide Information:** Some healthcare providers like Smith have created blogs primarily to provide information and perspective about the news of the day to readers. A typical "info-blogger" will spend time each day browsing the medical headlines and posting information – sometimes with commentary – on his or her blog.

One popular info-blog, *Kevin, MD* ([www.kevinmd.com/blog](http://www.kevinmd.com/blog)), is written by Kevin Pho, MD, an internist based in New Hampshire. Dr. Pho searches the Web for healthcare news every morning before he begins to see patients. He then posts these news items on his blog for people to comment on.

Dr. Pho “takes an interest in . . . hot-topic medical issues, since they directly impact [him] as a physician.” He views his blog as a “catalyst and outlet for . . . debate.” [29]

- **To Improve Treatment Practices:** Some healthcare providers start blogs specifically to improve treatment practices. One prominent project using blogs is Pursing Perfection. This project was initiated by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2001 and is designed to

“find ways to involve the [healthcare community] in improving the healthcare system.” [25]

Pursuing Perfection participants (i.e., physicians, nurses and hospital staff) used blogs to share information and updates about the program. (To read a sampling of Pursuing Perfection blogs, please visit <http://www.wppp.org/users/0000002>.)

Another “treatment blog” is *Clinical Cases and Images* (<http://clinicalcases.blogspot.com>), which was created by Dr. Ves Dimov. Dimov’s popular blog features medical commentary and clinical cases in a number of therapeutic categories, including neuroscience, infectious disease and cardiology. Physicians from

Dimov's former institution, Case Western Reserve University, also contribute to the blog.

### **Benefits of Healthcare Provider Blogs**

Healthcare provider blogs have a number of benefits. They:

- **Provide An Outlet:** Blogs provide medical professionals with an anonymous method of communicating with their peers and venting about their frustrations with the healthcare system.
- **Provide Accurate Information:** There is a lot of inaccurate information on the Internet about healthcare. Healthcare providers can use blogs to provide perspective and guidance to patients seeking medical information.

- **Improve The Provider-Patient Relationship:** According to a 2002 report issued by the Future of Family Medicine project, patients want their physicians to have excellent communication skills and partner with them to achieve good health.[30]

Blogs can help healthcare providers meet patient expectations by honing their written communications skills and signaling their willingness to be a partner in healthcare decision making.

- **To Market Themselves:** Healthcare providers sometimes use blogs to market themselves or their services to potential patients.

## Examples of Healthcare Provider Blogs

### "Diary" Healthcare Provider Blogs

- **NHS Blog Doctor**  
A physician with the British National Health Service blogs about his practice.  
(<http://nhsblogdoc.blogspot.com>)
- **Barbados Butterfly**  
A surgical registrar from Australia shares stories about her life and interactions with other healthcare professionals.  
(<http://barbadosbutterfly.blogspot.com>)
- **Doc Around The Clock**  
A physician in the Midwest blogs about his life and practice.  
([www.thedocaroundtheclock.com/dribear](http://www.thedocaroundtheclock.com/dribear))
- **The Nurse Practitioner's Place**  
A nurse practitioner discusses her experiences as a nurse and student.  
(<http://arnp.blogspot.com>)

### "Info" Healthcare Provider Blogs

- **Medpundit**  
A physician discusses medical news.  
(<http://medpundit.blogspot.com>)
- **Kidney Notes**  
A New York City-based nephrologist blogs about medical news and research.  
([www.kidneynotes.blogspot.com](http://www.kidneynotes.blogspot.com))
- **Over My Med Body**  
A medical student blogs about the healthcare system and his education.  
([www.grahamazon.com](http://www.grahamazon.com))
- **Grunt Doc**  
An emergency room physician provides updates on medical news and his practice.  
([www.gruntdoc.com](http://www.gruntdoc.com))
- **Psych Central**  
Psychiatrists blog about the latest mental health-related news.  
(<http://psychcentral.com/blog>)

### **"Treatment" Healthcare Provider Blogs**

- **Clinical Cases & Images**  
Physicians at Case Western Reserve University provide information on disease management.  
(<http://clinicalcases.blogspot.com>)
- **SimulConsult Cases Blog**  
A blog highlighting patient cases culled from news sources and healthcare provider submissions.  
([www.simulconsult.com/cases/index.html](http://www.simulconsult.com/cases/index.html))
- **Robotic Surgery Blog**  
Physicians in a New Jersey-based surgery practice provide information about robotic procedures.  
([www.njurology.com/RoboticSurgeryBlog](http://www.njurology.com/RoboticSurgeryBlog))
- **Inside Surgery**  
A Pennsylvania-based surgeon provides information about the benefits and drawbacks of surgical procedures.  
([www.insidesurgery.com](http://www.insidesurgery.com))

## HEALTHCARE EXPERT BLOGS

It was the post that reverberated throughout the healthcare blogosphere. On January 10, 2006, health policy expert Kate Steadman wrote an essay on her blog, *Healthy Policy* (<http://healthypolicy.typepad.com>), suggesting that defensive medicine is not “dictating [physician] behavior.”[31] (Defensive medicine is the practice of prescribing medications, ordering tests or providing treatment that is medically unnecessary in order to prevent a malpractice lawsuit.)

Healthcare bloggers reacted strongly to Steadman’s post. Dr. Kevin Pho, author of *Kevin MD* ([www.kevinmd.com/blogs](http://www.kevinmd.com/blogs)), said that Steadman “doesn’t really know what she is talking about.”[32] Physician-in-training Graham Walker’s response was more measured. He noted

that a variety of factors influence how physicians practice medicine, but fear of lawsuits is only one of them.[33]

Steadman’s post is just one example of how healthcare experts are influencing the blogosphere. Over the past several years, health policy specialists, managed care experts, marketers, consultants and others have begun blogging in increasing numbers.

In this chapter you will find:

- An analysis of why healthcare experts are blogging
- The benefits of healthcare expert blogs

- Examples of blogs developed by healthcare experts
- Tips for healthcare experts considering developing a blog

### Why Are Healthcare Experts Blogging?

Like providers and patients, healthcare experts blog for many reasons. Some of the most important include:

- **To Market Themselves:** Many healthcare experts start blogs to market themselves or their companies. For example, Joe Paduda, who writes *Managed Care Matters* ([www.joepaduda.com](http://www.joepaduda.com)), started a blog because “[he] wanted to do more for marketing [his] business and [he] didn’t want to follow the traditional mass direct mail or mass e-mail

process.”[34]

Paduda’s blogging efforts have reaped rewards for his business. “[Q]uite a bit of business [has come in because of my blog] . . . [clients] found me by doing a Web search and finding my blog and reading a lot of my opinions about what is going on.”[34]

- **To Educate:** Healthcare experts blog to educate readers about the healthcare industry, information technology and other subjects. For example, Matthew Holt, who writes the *Wall Street Journal*-endorsed blog *The Health Care Blog* ([www.thehealthcareblog.com](http://www.thehealthcareblog.com)), dedicated one post to explaining why people receive their health insurance via their employers.[35]

- **To Draw Attention To Issues & Spark**

**Debate:** Some bloggers feel it is their duty to highlight issues or incite debate. John Mack, author of *Pharma Marketing Blog* (<http://pharmamkting.blogspot.com>), is one example of a blogger who is highlighting controversial subjects. Since 2005, he has used his blog to discuss a range of issues relating to pharmaceutical marketing, including drug prices and direct-to-consumer advertising. (Please see the following chapter to read Mack's commentary about his blogging efforts.)

### **Blogging Tips**

Following are tips for healthcare experts thinking about starting a blog.

- **Determine why you want to blog.** Before starting a blog, think about why you are doing it and how it will benefit you, your organization and the blog's readers.
- **Settle on your "voice."** Determine the topics or issues you will focus on. Some bloggers comment about health policy while others discuss healthcare information technology. Having a strong voice will increase your readership and improve your blogging efforts.
- **Be sure your employers know that you are going to blog.** If you work for someone, make sure that he or she knows you are blogging. Inform them about how you will handle comments and preserve confidentiality.

## Who Is Blogging?

A range of healthcare experts are writing blogs, including:

- **Health Policy Experts:** These individuals write about a number of health policy-related topics, including Medicare Part D, healthcare reform and disease management.
- **Healthcare Information Technology (IT) Specialists:** Healthcare IT specialists focus on the design and implementation of information technology (e.g., electronic medical records, patient management software) in healthcare.
- **Managed Care Experts:** Managed care experts comment on health insurance-related issues such as workers compensation and

pharmacy benefit management.

- **Lawyers:** Lawyers provide information about numerous issues, including regulatory bodies and patient privacy.
- **Consultants:** A variety of healthcare consultants are writing blogs, including marketers, health promotion experts and others.
- **Other Healthcare Experts:** Other healthcare experts writing blogs include pharmaceutical researchers, students and advocates.

## Benefits Of Healthcare Expert Blogs

Providers, government officials, healthcare specialists, media and patients can benefit from

healthcare expert blogs in a number of ways.

Some of the most significant include:

- **Education:** Healthcare expert blogs are a valuable and highly credible source of up-to-date information, insight and commentary.
- **Dialogue:** Because blog visitors can interact directly with healthcare experts, they can receive solutions to difficult problems – free of charge.
- **Visibility:** A healthcare expert publishing a quality blog could become well known, enhancing his or her reputation and value to potential employers or clients.

## Examples Of Healthcare Expert Blogs

### Health Policy

- **The Health Care Blog**  
A health policy expert reviews and dissects the healthcare news of the day.  
([www.thehealthcareblog.com](http://www.thehealthcareblog.com))
- **Healthy Policy**  
A “health policy wonk” analyzes the US healthcare system.  
(<http://healthypolicy.typepad.com/blog>)

### Healthcare Information Technology

- **The Healthcare IT Guy**  
A specialist shares insights on healthcare information technology-related topics.  
([www.healthcareguy.com](http://www.healthcareguy.com))
- **HealthNex**  
IBM employees blog about healthcare information technology.  
([www.healthnex.typepad.com](http://www.healthnex.typepad.com))

### Managed Care

- **Managed Care Matters**  
A managed care expert dissects managed-care related news and information.  
([www.joepaduda.com](http://www.joepaduda.com))

### Healthcare Law

- **Health Law Prof Blog**  
A blog maintained by two law professors teaching at the University of Cincinnati College of Law and the University of Texas, Southwestern Medical School (Dallas)  
([http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/healthlawprof\\_blog/](http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/healthlawprof_blog/))

### Healthcare Marketing

- **Pharma Marketing Blog**  
A newsletter editor offers commentary and criticism of pharmaceutical marketing practices.  
(<http://pharmamkting.blogspot.com>)

### Other Healthcare Experts

- **Hospital Impact**  
Experts discuss hospital administration and other topics.  
([www.hospitalimpact.org](http://www.hospitalimpact.org))
- **In The Pipeline**  
A pharmaceutical researcher blogs about his industry.  
([www.corante.com/pipeline](http://www.corante.com/pipeline))
- **Eels In Vinegar**  
A blog about trends in biomedical communications.  
([www.eelsinvinegar.org](http://www.eelsinvinegar.org))
- **MSSP Nexus Blog**  
A medical service professional blogs about management and healthcare quality.  
(<http://msspnextus.blogspot.com>)
- **UBC Google Scholar Blog**  
A librarian based at the University of British Columbia Library blogs about Google Scholar, medical search and other issues.  
(<http://weblogs.elearning.ubc.ca/googlescholar>)

**John Mack | Blog: Pharma Marketing Blog**

*John Mack is author of Pharma Marketing News, a widely read newsletter that provides insight and information to marketers in the pharmaceutical industry. In January 2005, Mack launched the Pharma Marketing Blog*

*(<http://pharmamkting.blogspot.com>) to give himself a forum to air his opinions on a wide variety of pharmaceutical marketing-related topics.*

*In November 2005, the Wall Street Journal called Mack's Weblog one of the most influential blogs in healthcare. Following are excerpts from an essay Mack published in the December 2005 edition of Pharma Marketing News about how he became a pharmaceutical industry pundit.*

*Why Mack Started His Blog*

When I started *Pharma Marketing Blog* in January 2005, my goal was to have a place to be as opinionated as I desired and as often as needed rather than using *Pharma Marketing News* as a vehicle for my personal opinions.

*How His Blog Has Evolved*

At first, I didn't think the *Pharma Marketing Blog* would be as important as the Pharma Marketing Network Web site, which has a lot of resources for pharmaceutical marketers. Now, however, the [blog] is indispensable to my effort to build and maintain the subscriber base and raise the visibility of the Pharma Marketing Network Web site in major search engines.

*Why He Thinks His Blog Is Valuable*

Journalists may join a [listserv] or subscribe to newsletters like *Pharma Marketing News* to keep up on issues they report on, but they quickly tire of the associated e-mail and advertising that is not relevant to their needs. It is much easier for them to keep up with blogs like the *Pharma Marketing Blog* . . . and contact me for my insight and quotes. Because of my blog, I have become a pharma marketing pundit!

In other words, a blog is an ideal method to keep in touch with reporters and journalists.

Pharmaceutical companies can learn a lesson from this, not only to improve their public relations efforts, but also to communicate with their customers.

## HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS AND BLOGS

As discussed in previous chapters, healthcare providers, experts and patients have been quick to embrace blogs. Healthcare organizations have recognized that blogs are a valuable source of market research and are monitoring them.<sup>11</sup>

However, few pharmaceutical, biotech and device manufacturers, managed care organizations (MCOs) and hospitals have created blogs. This may be because healthcare executives are skeptical and fearful of them.

Is their negative opinion of blogs justified? Yes, and no. This chapter features an exploration of some of the cons and pros of blogs. The purpose of this analysis is to help healthcare executives

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<sup>11</sup> For example, 14 of the 15 largest global pharmaceutical companies rely on Nielsen BuzzMetrics ([www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com](http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com)) to monitor blogs for information and commentary on products they manufacture.

make an informed decision about whether a blog is an ideal communications channel for their organization. Tips on how to develop a successful blog are included for organizations thinking about entering the healthcare blogosphere.

### Cons & Pros of Blogging:

#### Pharmaceutical/Biotech/Device Companies, MCOs

##### *Con: Regulations Prevent Us From Blogging*

Intense regulation is one of the most important reasons why healthcare organizations have been slow to embrace blogs. Regulatory authorities like the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United Kingdom Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency closely monitor the marketing activities of pharmaceutical, biotech and device companies. Regulators' primary

concern is that firms do not market their products for unapproved uses or provide inaccurate information to healthcare providers and patients.

A complicating factor is that regulators outside of the United States and New Zealand do not allow companies to promote medications or devices directly to patients.

With regard to communicating directly to the public, managed care organizations are under less regulatory burden. MCOs' primary responsibility is to ensure that they provide accurate healthcare information and protect patient privacy.

A pharmaceutical/biotech company or device manufacturer thinking about starting a public blog must first answer a number of difficult questions. Some of the most important include:

- **How do we ensure information on the blog is accurate and “on-label”?** There is a distinct possibility that a regulator would view a blog as a marketing tool. Given this, a company would have to ensure that any discussion of a company's products or devices is accurate and for approved uses. Does this mean that the company would be responsible for its own content *and* comments left by the public? Is it feasible and appropriate to censor comments by people discussing “off-label” or unapproved uses of a medical product?
- **What do we do if someone reports a side effect?** Companies are required to report side effects patients experience with drugs and devices to regulatory authorities. What should be the procedure if someone reports a side effect on a blog? Does a company want this

kind of information posted on its Weblog?

- **What do we do if someone posts information about our competitors' products on our blog?** Drug and device manufacturers are in the business of promoting their products – not their competitors. Should comments – positive or negative – about another firm's products appear on a company blog?

MCOs also have difficult questions to answer about the feasibility of starting a company blog. Key questions include:

- **How do we protect patient privacy?** MCOs are responsible for protecting the privacy of the patients they serve. If they recruit patients to talk about their experiences on

their blog, it would be a simple matter to obtain permission to publish information about them. However, what should be done about other patients? Should they be asked to sign a waiver before being allowed to comment? Would this policy stifle dialogue and debate?

- **How do we deal with negative commentary?** How should a MCO react if a complaint about its practices is posted on its blog? Should it censor this information? Is censorship feasible or responsible?

*Pro: Regulations Are Manageable – With Effort*

If a pharmaceutical/biotech/device company or MCO decides to blog, it may find that regulators can be managed – with effort.

For example, Envision Solutions spoke with a Food and Drug Administration official about how the agency might regulate a pharmaceutical company blog. The FDA representative gave the following unofficial guidance to Envision Solutions:

- **We Have No Official Policy:** The FDA has no official policy on blogs or Internet marketing in general.<sup>12</sup> Given this, the agency might regulate blogs on a case-by-case basis. This is the FDA's usual practice with Web sites created by drug or device makers.
- **Information Has To Be Accurate:** The FDA's major concern is that information posted

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<sup>12</sup> In October 1996, the FDA held public hearings to help it develop a policy on how it would regulate on-line advertising and marketing activities. However, in July 1999, the FDA announced that it was suspending its efforts to develop guidance indefinitely.[36]

by a company on a blog is accurate. The representative had no opinion on comments posted by the public.

As Envision Solutions' discussion with the FDA indicates, the best way to learn regulators' views about blogs is to ask them. Engaging in dialogue can help healthcare organizations learn whether the regulatory environment is favorable to corporate blogging.

*Con: Blogs Are Not Worth The Time & Expense*  
MCOs and drug/device makers have limited resources to engage in marketing activities. All expenditures must result in increased uptake of a company's products and services. Given this, it is not surprising that healthcare executives are skeptical of a blog's ability to drive sales. Some common questions they may ask include:

- Why should we blog if we can't talk about our products or services with patients?
- How can I determine if a blog visitor will be more or less likely to use my products and services?
- People don't like pharmaceutical/biotech companies, MCOs and device makers. Will they trust anything we say on a blog?

These are difficult questions to answer. If a healthcare executive cannot measure the impact of a blog on company reputation, customer responsiveness or sales, he or she may decide that blogging is not worth the time or effort.

*Pro: Blogs Have Many Benefits Beyond Sales*

Corporate blogging is about more than generating sales. As Microsoft and Macromedia have learned, having the ability to communicate directly with customers can help to positively shift public opinion about a company. Microsoft, for example, has used blogs to put a "kinder and gentler" face on the company.

Clearly, the public has a generally low opinion of MCOs, pharmaceutical/biotech companies and device manufacturers. However, engaging critics directly via a blog could benefit companies in numerous ways. Most importantly, a blog would allow a company to provide its unfiltered and honest commentary on the important issues of the day.

The French unit of pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) launched a blog in May 2005 for this purpose. The blog, *L'Avenir de la Sante* ([www.avenirdelasante.fr](http://www.avenirdelasante.fr)), was created to foster debate about the future of healthcare in France.<sup>13</sup> The blog provides the company with an outlet for raising issues and soliciting responses from critics and supporters of the French pharmaceutical industry (see below for more information about GSK's blog).

*Con: We Can't Control The Message*

Given the extensive rules and regulations MCOs, and drug/device makers must adhere to, these companies tightly control all communications with the public. At many firms, internal legal and regulatory officials review all public statements to ensure that they comply with regulatory guidance.

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<sup>13</sup> *L'Avenir de la Sante*: The Future of Health.

With all of this regulatory scrutiny, are blogs an ideal communications medium for healthcare companies? Should a committee review every blog post before it is published? How would a company respond to comments in a timely fashion?

*Pro: Develop An Editorial Process & Blogging May Become Feasible*

There are no easy answers to the questions raised above. A company committed to communicating via blogs would have to speak with regulators to determine what is acceptable. It would also have to develop editorial procedures and policies to ensure its blog complies with regulations.

## Cons & Pros Of Blogging: Hospitals

### *Con: We Can't Protect Patient Privacy*

When considering whether to start a blog hospital executives may ask themselves a number of questions, such as:

- Should we develop a hospital blog or is sponsoring patient blogs more valuable?
- If we sponsor patient blogs, how do we protect patient privacy?
- What do we do if a patient decides to blog but later changes her mind? Do we delete all of her blog posts?

*Pro: Patient Privacy Concerns Are Easily Managed*  
Fortunately, there are two simple steps hospitals can take to protect patient privacy:

- **Ask Patients To Sign A Waiver:** Patients wishing to blog can sign a document giving the hospital the right to publish information about them – whether or not they use pseudonyms.
- **Moderate Patient Comments:** Ask patients and others to grant the hospital permission to publish their comments before posting.

### *Con: Blogging Can't Help Us Bring In Customers*

Some hospital executives – especially those working for specialty clinics that rely on revenue generated from outpatient services – may wonder whether a blog will drive patients into the hospital.

This is a valid critique of blogging, as it is difficult to measure whether a blog visitor will translate into an immediate customer. However, as discussed below, a hospital blog may have long-term benefits.

*Pro: Blogs Can Deepen A Hospital's Relationship With Its Customers*

A hospital can only benefit from establishing deeper relationships with its customers. Blogs are the perfect forum for a hospital to provide valuable information, insight and commentary to those they serve. While blog readers may not become customers immediately, they will appreciate the opportunity to learn how a hospital thinks, feels and functions.

**Case Studies:**

**Healthcare Organizations With Blogs**

Despite the many issues associated with blogging, a few healthcare organizations have created their own Weblogs. Following are four case studies highlighting their blogging efforts.

*Pharmaceutical Company Blog: L'Avenir de la Sante (The Future Of Health)*

The Purpose Of The Blog

In May 2005, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) became the first pharmaceutical manufacturer to start an official blog, *L'Avenir de la Sante* ([www.avenirdelasante.fr](http://www.avenirdelasante.fr)). Launching the blog was the idea of Christophe Weber, chairman and managing director of GSK's French unit, Laboratoires GlaxoSmithKline. His goal was to provide people with a place to debate issues relating to France's healthcare system.[37]

### How GSK Manages Content & Comments

Unlike many healthcare blogs, which post on a variety of subjects on a regular basis, GSK limits its postings to a few topics.

For example in 2005, GSK focused on drug risk, marketing transparency and media coverage of pharmaceuticals.

GSK manages blog commentary by:

- **Only Allowing “On-Topic” Comments:** GSK asks respondents to limit their commentary to approved topics.
- **Moderating Comments:** GSK has assigned an employee to moderate reader comments. Veronique Delvolvé, Laboratories GlaxoSmithKline’s director of public affairs, is

responsible for screening and posting reader comments to the blog.

GSK has indicated that it has the right to refuse to publish comments that are:

- Off topic
- Promote a product or drug
- Offensive
- Violate intellectual property laws

GSK’s policy is to remove comments upon request.

### Impact Of The Blog

Based on the quality and quantity of comments posted to GSK's blog, it appears to be helping the company achieve its objective of fostering debate about French healthcare.

#### **Pharmaceutical, Biotech, Medical Device Maker, MCO Blogs: Tips For Successful Blogging**

Following are tips for developing a successful corporate blog.

- **Check With Regulators:** Before starting a blog, check with regulators. They can provide valuable guidance about what types of content will be allowed on a corporate blog.
- **Figure Out Why You Want To Blog:** Do you want to comment on healthcare-related issues? Do you want to promote your products? Before starting a blog, figure out why you want one and how it will benefit the company.

- **Develop A Blogging Editorial & Comment Policy:** Develop and publish policies that guide content development and comment moderation.
- **Start An Internal Pilot Blog:** Unsure about how to manage a company blog, but want to experiment with the technology? Consider starting an internal pilot blog. This is a safe way to learn whether a corporate blog is feasible.
- **Be Human:** The beauty of blogs is that they allow companies to present a human face to the world. Consider selecting individuals to author blogs who are knowledgeable and passionate about a drug or product. They will be in a better position to attract readers and spark conversation.
- **Post Frequently:** Consider forming a committee that is responsible for regularly reviewing blog content to ensure it is accurate and that posts appear frequently.

*Medical Device Manufacturer Blogs: GE Healthcare RSNA Blog; The GE Healthcare Blog*

### The Purpose Of GE's Blogs

In late 2005 and early 2006, GE Healthcare launched two blogs: *GE Healthcare RSNA* (<http://geblog.typepad.com/rsna>) and the *GE Healthcare Blog* (<http://gehealthcare.typepad.com>).

GE launched its first blog at the 2005 Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) annual meeting. The GE Healthcare RSNA blog was designed to help GE sales representatives and exhibitors communicate with meeting attendees.

In January 2006, it created the *GE Healthcare Blog* "to facilitate an informal dialog with GE Healthcare leaders about GE Healthcare activities,

projects and events in Europe." [38]

### Managing Content & Comments

As GE's RSNA blog was created for a specific event, the company only published information about its activities in the RSNA exhibit hall.

GE's asked users to restrict their comments to topics featured on the blog (i.e., GE's products and the future of radiology.)

The *GE Healthcare Blog* is written by GE marketing executives and focuses on the company's products. It is infrequently updated and blog content appears to have been closely vetted.

### The Impact Of GE's Blogs

From outside of the company, it is difficult to determine whether the GE blogs have had much of an impact. For example, it appears that the *GE Healthcare Blog* may not be very popular or heavily promoted. As of April 2006, only one reader had posted a comment to the blog.

*MCO Blog: eHealthInsurance Sponsors Healthy Concerns (Sponsorship Ended: February 2006)*

### The Purpose Of The Blog

From May 2005 to February 2006, eHealthInsurance, which provides health insurance to individuals, families and small businesses, was the exclusive sponsor of *HealthyConcerns* ([www.healthyconcerns.com](http://www.healthyconcerns.com)). Marketing consultant Elisa Camahort is the author of the blog.

eHealthInsurance decided to sponsor *HealthyConcerns* to foster conversations “about healthcare from the point of view of their customers.”[39] eHealthInsurance also wanted to publish a series of question and answer sessions with patients seeking information about health insurance.[40]

### How eHealthInsurance Maintained The Blog's Credibility

Camahort agreed to write the blog under the condition that eHealthInsurance cede control of its content.

Camahort also was sure to inform readers that eHealthInsurance sponsored the blog. Camahort did this by displaying the company's logo prominently on the Weblog.

### The Impact Of The Blog

*HealthyConcerns* has become one of the healthcare blogosphere's most dynamic and popular Weblogs. Camahort has attracted a dedicated readership and other healthcare bloggers regularly comment on and link to her blog posts.

However, eHealthInsurance did not meet all of its goals. The company devoted significant financial resources to the blog, but did not fully leverage its relationship with Camahort. It did not provide Camahort with content or sponsor question and answer sessions.[40]

On February 15, 2006, Camahort announced that she had ended her partnership with eHealthInsurance.[40] Despite discontinuing her

relationship with the company, Camahort continues to maintain *HealthyConcerns*.

### *Hospital Blogs: High Point Regional Health System Patient Blogs*

#### The Purpose Of High Point's Blogs

In 2005, High Point Regional Health System launched three patient blogs ([www.highpointregional.com/blogs](http://www.highpointregional.com/blogs)). High Point started the blogs to foster communication and dialogue with its patients.[41] Patients experiencing childbirth, gastric bypass surgery and cancer write the blogs.

#### How High Point Protects Patient Privacy

High Point protects patient privacy by withholding their full names and other identifying information.

### How High Point Manages Comments

High Point has instituted an e-mail comment system on its blogs. High Point screens all e-mailed comments for offensive or off-topic content.

High Point views its comment policy as a work – in-progress. While the hospital does not censor its blogs, executives are concerned about how to manage negative comments about physicians or other hospitals.[42]

### The Impact Of The Blog

According to High Point, it has “anecdotal evidence” of the blog’s therapeutic value.[42] In addition, at least one patient has decided to have surgery at High Point because they read its blogs.[42]

### **Hospital Blogs: Tips For Successful Blogging**

Following are tips for hospital executives thinking about starting or sponsoring a blog.

- **Decide What Type Of Blog To Develop:** Consider the value of developing an “official” hospital blog or sponsoring patient Weblogs. Patient blogs can help highlight a hospital’s services. A hospital blog can also provide readers with insight about how it functions and supports the community.
- **Develop A Comment Policy:** Determine how the hospital will handle comments. What types of comments will the hospital allow? How will it deal with negative commentary?
- **Encourage Staff To Participate:** Consider asking hospital employees to post comments or articles to the blog. This is a good way to promote the blog within the hospital and help customers learn about the facility.

## VOICES FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE

### **Shahid Shah | Blog: The Healthcare IT Guy**

*Shahid Shah is a healthcare information technology (IT) expert and author of three Weblogs, including the popular blog, The Healthcare IT Guy ([www.healthcareguy.com](http://www.healthcareguy.com)).*

*Shah is also Chief Executive Officer of healthcare IT firm Netspective, and is a self-described "corporate blogging evangelist." Shah wrote an essay in February 2006 urging pharmaceutical companies to enter the healthcare blogosphere. His widely cited article appears below.*

### **Pharma: Have No Fear Of The Blogosphere**

Corporate blogging is certainly not new but it hasn't really taken off because executives are always nervous about public statements they make, especially if they run a public company.

Until now only small firms, who have much to gain from direct two-way contact with their customers, have really engaged their clients through blogs. Now, however, even big companies as different as McDonalds and Microsoft have become corporate bloggers with different degrees of success.

The pharmaceutical industry is certainly one group of companies that could use the increased goodwill that comes from direct contact with their customers. If anyone should be blogging from a corporate perspective it should be "Big Pharma" because what it does directly touches the lives of its customers in a way very few other industries do.

The level of importance people give to their health and the way that they bond with their healthcare providers (and by extension the drugs they take)

is very important. Most pharma companies are worried about the FDA and cite that as a big concern about why they don't blog. But, I think that's a mistake.

Pharma shouldn't worry too much about what the FDA has to say about blogs. Blogging does not impact anything that wouldn't already be public anyway. For example, if a pharmaceutical firm has a call center where they answer questions about their drugs' on-label use, a blog would be no different. In fact, drug firms can improve customer service by providing tips, tools and guidance on how best to use their drugs. I recommend that firms create blogs that tell stories of why scientists (in their own words) are focusing on certain diseases, how far technology has come along and how exactly drugs go from an idea, to discovery, to production. All these activities would bring customers closer to them,

not alienate them. And, the FDA won't complain about anything that doesn't cause off-label use. I spoke with an FDA counsel recently and they basically said the same thing (without providing specific or official legal guidance). Anything that's covered by existing guidance would apply to blogs, too.

If a drug vendor starts a blog or discussion forum about its products and doesn't mis-communicate about the efficacy of its products or fitness for a particular purpose, it shouldn't get into trouble. Companies won't have problems with regulators if they stick to the truth about their products and improve the way customers interact with them.

That doesn't mean they shouldn't be careful about what they say — but that goes for anything a company says. It's not something special to blogging, but blogs make it easy for people to say

whatever they want (like folks do in an e-mail).

So, if you're not blogging today don't blame the feds. If you're not creating corporate blogs, it's due to a lack of vision and innovation and perhaps a lack of respect for your customers, not the FDA.

Rely on healthcare blogging experts to help you devise an appropriate strategy to allow direct communication and improved customer service. Who knows, in a few years people may stop thinking of Big Pharma in a poor light like they do now.

Oh, and by the way, don't think that just because you're not blogging about your own products that nobody else is. Nature abhors a vacuum and so does the blogging community. Third parties are already talking about your drugs and company on their own blogs and forums. Why not take the

initiative and help navigate people to the "official" word about your drugs?

## HEALTHCARE NON-PROFITS AND BLOGS

In 2003, Zafar S. Shah wrote an article, "What's A Blog, and Why Should Nonprofits Care?," that helped introduce blogs to the non-profit community.[43] The article, which appeared in *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, provided a wealth of advice to non-profits considering developing a Weblog.

Despite early enthusiasm for blogs in some parts of the non-profit community, many organizations have been slow to embrace them. This is especially true for healthcare non-profits. As of March 2006, only a handful of these organizations had started blogs.

It is not surprising that healthcare non-profits have been slow to embrace blogs. Some non-profit executives may feel that their

communications resources would be better spent on traditional media such as newsletters, telephone calls and letters, which may have a better chance of reaching their donors or other stakeholders.

In addition, writing a good blog takes a lot of commitment. When faced with the choice of developing a blog or writing a newsletter, some non-profit managers may decide that a newsletter is a better investment.

Executives at healthcare non-profits have valid concerns about whether blogs will help them further the mission of the organizations they serve. The purpose of this chapter is to help them make an informed decision about whether blogs will enhance their communications activities.

In the first half of this chapter, you will find an analysis of the cons and pros of blogging. The second half features several examples of blogs developed by healthcare non-profits. Read these case studies to learn how these organizations are using blogs to raise awareness, educate their constituents and attract supporters.

### **Four Reasons Why A Healthcare Non-Profit Should Not Start A Blog**

#### *Reason #1: You Cannot Reach Your Stakeholders With A Blog*

Healthcare non-profits serve diverse audiences and are supported by many different types of donors. Before deciding whether to develop a blog, think about how you generally communicate with your key stakeholders.

For example, take the case of a fictional healthcare non-profit whose mission is to communicate HIV/AIDS health promotion messages to at-risk youths living in the inner city. Internet access among the people they serve is limited. Also, most of the non-profit's support comes from individual donors reached via direct mail. Finally, the organization has built up a strong network of partners within its community that are reached via telephone, mail and word-of-mouth.

Clearly, a blog is not the best communications medium for an organization of this type. A Weblog will have little impact on the people the non-profit serves or its primary donors.

Before starting a blog, carefully consider how your key stakeholders receive and consume

information about your organization. Doing so will help you determine whether a blog is an effective means of communicating with them.

*Reason #2: You Have Not Clearly Defined Your Key Audiences*

Unfortunately, some healthcare non-profits have not clearly defined their primary audience(s), which can negatively affect a blogging effort. Good blogs have a distinct voice and speak directly to specific individuals or groups. It will be difficult for a non-profit that has not identified who it serving and what it is saying to them to develop a successful blog.

Before starting a blog (or any new communications effort), a healthcare non-profit should do the hard work of clarifying or identifying its key audiences and deciding what

should be communicated to them.

*Reason #3: You Are Not Willing Or Able To Devote Staff Resources To A Blog*

Blogging can be a rewarding activity. However, blogs require a significant amount of time and effort to maintain. On average, a blogger spends between 30 minutes to two hours a day updating his or her blog. This includes time spent researching, writing and editing blog content.

Given this, a healthcare non-profit has to decide whether it can devote staff resources to developing and maintaining a blog. Having a clear vision for the blog and people who are enthusiastic about writing it is also critical.

*Reason #4: Leadership Is Not Committed To Creating & Maintaining A Blog*

Any sustained communications effort will require the commitment and support of an organization's leadership if it is going to succeed. This is even more critical when it comes to blogs.

Before starting a blog, be sure that senior management supports the effort and understands why it will benefit the organization. No organization should undertake a blogging campaign if it has not been endorsed by its leadership.

### **Four Reasons Why A Healthcare Non-Profit Should Start A Blog**

#### *Reasons #1: A Blog Can Propel An Organization To Thought Leader Status*

A blog is an excellent way for a healthcare non-profit to demonstrate its credibility, expertise and

thought leader status. An organization can use the blog to comment on news items, provide guidance and publicize little-known issues. Being recognized as a thought leader can result in increased media attention, bolster a non-profit's reputation and attract increased financial and volunteer support.

#### *Reason #2: A Blog Is A Great Way To Demonstrate Success*

Donors and other supporters of healthcare non-profits want organizations to demonstrate how they are using their contributions. A blog is a great means of showcasing a non-profit's successes – as they happen. In addition, by encouraging commentary on its activities via its blog, a non-profit can demonstrate its accountability to its stakeholders.

*Reason #3: A Blog Can Help An Organization Strengthen Links To Others*

Michael Gilbert, non-profit blogging pioneer and publisher of the *Nonprofit Online News Journal*, has asserted that the non-profit “sector is too professionalized, too specialized and too atomized.” [44]

He suggests that one way to increase a non-profit’s links to supporters and other stakeholders is to start a blog. He says: “Blogging can break down some of the barriers that are preventing projects from scaling and individuals from being as successful as they might be if the full power of connectivity was pursued.” [44]

The opportunity for a healthcare non-profit to build (or become part of) a strong and vibrant

community is another excellent reason to start a blog.

*Reason #4: A Blog Can Increase An Organization's Visibility & Responsiveness*

Blogs can help an organization increase its visibility in a number of ways, including:

- **Search Engine Ranking:** Blogs are regularly indexed by search engines like Google and Yahoo!. If a healthcare non-profit has a blog, there is a chance that people searching for information may find it via its Weblog and potentially become a supporter.
- **Media Attention:** Media regularly visit blogs for news and information. If a healthcare non-profit has a blog, it may attract journalists’ attention, which may result in media coverage.

Blogs can also improve a healthcare non-profits' responsiveness. For example, an organization can solicit feedback from constituents on planned activities and special projects. Or, a non-profit may use a blog to obtain feedback on its current activities. A blog can become a valuable source of information about how well an organization is serving its constituents or how the community may respond to planned initiatives.

### **Case Studies: Healthcare Non-Profit Blogs**

Following are three examples of how healthcare non-profits are using blogs to increase their visibility, communicate with others and showcase their efforts.

*The MIRACLE Campaign: Blogging To Restore Health Coverage For Legal Immigrants*

#### The Purpose Of The Blog

In March 2005, the MIRACLE Campaign (Massachusetts Immigrant Health Restoration Advocacy Campaign For Long-term Equality) launched a Weblog (<http://miracle-realclout.blogspot.com>) to chronicle its efforts to restore state-funded healthcare to legal immigrants residing in Massachusetts.

The blog is also designed to provide MIRACLE Campaign supporters with a means of communicating with program participants and educating others engaged in similar efforts.

### The Benefits Of The Blog

The benefits of the MIRACLE Campaign blog include:

- **Facilitating Communication:** The blog enables MIRACLE Campaign participants to quickly learn about new developments and events.
- **Highlighting Successes:** Members of the campaign use the blog to discuss campaign victories, including a successful effort to help 2,000 elderly and disabled immigrants “keep their health care through the Mass Health Essential program.” [45]
- **Garnering Assistance:** The MIRACLE Campaign regularly uses the blog to garner assistance from campaign participants. For

example, in August 2005, staff asked for help gathering stories from immigrants who had to go without healthcare insurance.[46]

*The Hastings Center: Blogging To Highlight Commentary About Medical Ethics*

### The Purpose Of The Blog

In March 2006, The Hastings Center, a New York-based independent bioethics institute, launched a blog, *The Bioethics Forum* ([www.bioethicsforum.org](http://www.bioethicsforum.org)). The blog is designed to highlight commentary from prominent bioethics experts and others on current medical controversies such as abortion and physician-assisted suicide.

In addition, Greg Kaebnick, the editor of the blog, told Envision Solutions that the Weblog enables

The Hastings Center to provide well-considered commentary on current bioethical issues in a timely fashion. Some told Kaebnick that the *Hastings Center Report's* bi-monthly publication schedule does not allow the organization to quickly comment on current events.[47]

### The Benefits Of The Blog

According to Kaebnick, *Bioethics Forum* enables The Hastings Center to:

- Combine the “timeliness and liveliness that the Internet makes possible” with the “careful and thoughtful work that the Internet is not always known for.”[48]
- “Broaden and deepen . . . social debates about bioethical issues.”[48]

- Continue its “35-year tradition of bringing together people from different perspectives” to “share their ideas and collectively examine them.”[48]

*MRSA Resources: Advocates Blog To Limit The Spread of Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria*

### The Purpose Of The Blog

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a type of antibiotic resistant bacteria that causes a variety of illnesses, including toxic shock syndrome and blood infections.

MRSA Resources, a non-profit organization focusing on stemming the spread of antibiotic resistance, launched the *MRSA Resources Blog* ([www.blogs.mrsaresources.com](http://www.blogs.mrsaresources.com)) in August 2005.

The blog features updates on MRSA-related news and information on national and global efforts to combat antibiotic resistant bacteria.

### The Benefits Of The Blog

The blog has enabled MRSA Resources to further two of its objectives: educate on antibiotic resistant bacteria and raise awareness of MRSA.

In addition, the blog has:

- Provided people suffering from MRSA with information about their condition. (MRSA Resources also sponsors a bulletin board for those with MRSA.)
- Enabled MRSA Resources to build contacts with other non-profits and individuals fighting MRSA globally.

## **Additional Examples Of Healthcare Non-Profit Blogs**

### **Healthcare Non-Profit Blogs**

- **American Cancer Society**  
Dr. Len Lichtenfeld, deputy chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society, blogs about medical news, the future of cancer therapy and other topics.  
([www.cancer.org/aspx/blog](http://www.cancer.org/aspx/blog))
- **Planned Parenthood**  
Planned Parenthood's *Now What?! Blog* is designed to provide readers with the latest abortion-related news.  
([www.saveroe.com/blog](http://www.saveroe.com/blog))
- **The March Of Dimes**  
The March Of Dimes has created a blogging community for families wishing to share about the experience of having a premature baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.  
([www.shareyourstory.org](http://www.shareyourstory.org))

- **The American Lung Association Of Minnesota (ALAMN)**  
ALAMN's blog is designed to enable the organization to raise awareness about asthma, fundraisers, pollution, anti-smoking efforts and other issues.  
([www.alamn.org/media/blogger.html](http://www.alamn.org/media/blogger.html))
- **The Constellation For AIDs Competence**  
This Thailand-based organization uses its blog to communicate with its stakeholders about its AIDs education efforts.  
(<http://aids-competence.blogspot.com>)
- **Birmingham Red Cross**  
The Birmingham, Alabama Red Cross has launched a blog to alert media about its activities in the region.  
(<http://redcrossbirmingham.blogspot.com>)
- **Center For Global Development: Vaccines For Development Blog**  
This Weblog focuses on issues related to vaccine research and production in developing countries. The Center For Global Development, a non-profit working

to reduce global inequality and poverty, hosts the blog.  
(<http://blogs.cgdev.org/vaccine>)

- **Center For Medicine In The Public Interest: Drug Wonk Blog**  
This Weblog was established by the Center for Medicine in the Public Interest to offer commentary by policy experts, researchers, regulators and others on news relating to medicine and public health.  
([www.drugwonks.com](http://www.drugwonks.com))

## VOICES FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE

**John E. McDonough | Blog: A Healthy Blog**

**Robert French | Blog: InfOpinions?**

*John McDonough is the Executive Director of Health Care For All (HCFA), a consumer health advocacy organization based in Massachusetts. According to HCFA's mission statement, it's goal "is to create a health care system that is responsive to the needs of all people, particularly the most vulnerable."*

*McDonough launched HCFA's blog, A Healthy Blog ([www.hcfama.org/blog](http://www.hcfama.org/blog)), in April 2005 to provide information and commentary on Massachusetts-related health policy issues.*

*Robert French, of Auburn University in Alabama, is one of the United States' most influential bloggers. Over the past several years, he has focused on helping students at Auburn University understand the implications of Web 2.0 technologies for marketing communications. He developed the popular blog network, [prblogs.org](http://prblogs.org) for this purpose. French also writes an influential blog *InfOpinions?* (<http://www.auburnmedia.com/wordpress/>) focusing on public relations and marketing.*

*French is leading efforts to encourage non-profits to embrace blogging, podcasting and other new communications channels. He is currently working with the Alabama Special Camp for Children and Adults – Easter Seals Camp (ASCCA) on several special Web 2.0-related projects,*

*including a blog, Camp ASCCA Journal ([www.campascca.org/journal](http://www.campascca.org/journal)).*

*Following is McDonough and French's commentary on healthcare non-profit blogs and HCFA/ASCCA's blogging efforts.*

### **John McDonough On HCFA's Blog**

**Q:** Why did Health Care For All decide to start a blog?

**A:** We decided to start a blog to communicate with our members, media, funders, public officials, and key supporters on a more frequent basis and to provide a mechanism for easy, instant feedback from all the above.

**Q:** What impact has the blog had on your organization?

**A:** The blog has increased HCFA's public profile and made it easier for us to communicate our message. It has also helped us build new relationships with the Massachusetts blogging community.

**Q:** Has the blog had an impact on your fundraising efforts?

**A:** It is unclear whether the blog has affected our fundraising efforts because we don't have hard evidence to suggest that it has. However, I don't think the blog has hurt.

**Q:** Has the blog had an impact on your visibility?

**A:** Absolutely. We believe we have in the neighborhood of 500-1000 daily readers.

**Q:** How do you see the blog evolving in the future?

**A:** Right now, it's unclear how the blog will evolve. Just adding content every day is enough of a challenge. We plan to assess the blog's impact on our one-year anniversary: April 1, 2006.

### **Robert French On ASCCA's Blog & Non-Profit Blogging**

*French On ASCCA's Blog*

**Q:** Why did ASCCA decide to start a blog?

**A:** Camp ASCCA is a large facility with a small budget. Social media is actually quite inexpensive to launch. The "family" of people that make up our target audiences is quite diverse. They range from the lowest to the highest of socio-economic demographic groups. One thing we have found, however, is that most of our audiences have access to the Internet. Also, the groups we will target for fund-raising are all online and want to see an online presence.

Ultimately, we have a few basic goals in developing this site.

- Build an online community of stakeholders: campers, parents, staff (past and potential future staff) and potential donors and volunteers.

- Use the site to deliver content to interested area media through our newsroom and photo galleries.
- Entice local media to visit the site through the newsroom, photo galleries, video sharing communities (Google Video [[www.video.google.com](http://www.video.google.com)], YouTube [[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)], etc.
- Communicate with parents and influencers (teachers, therapists, doctors, nurses) that may refer individuals to our camp.
- Build our search results for key terms and phrases in all of the search engines. Since more and more people go online first to find what they are looking for, being well represented in search engines is a required

marketing strategy today.

**Q:** How has the blog affected ASCCA's visibility,

**A:** The project is still young. We have already noticed that our search placement has improved on several of our key terms and phrases.

We have also learned a lot about how people are searching for "special needs camps" and other services for people with disabilities. As of today, requests for applications and information is up and the number of applications we have received is also up. We believe that the enhanced Web site has contributed to this success.

**Q:** and financial and/or volunteer support?

**A:** Again, the project is still young. One much appreciated aspect that we can point to is the ability to quickly post information and photos of fund-raising events to our site. This was not possible with the previous static site. Now, the site is quite dynamic.

**Q:** How has the blog affected other aspects of the organization?

**A:** One natural aspect of launching the site is that the staff has become more interested in, and actively participates in, the organization's marketing plan. They want to help find new campers and volunteers and view the sites as effective tools.

**Q:** How do you see the blog evolving in the future?

More and more non-profits will be taking to blogs and social media. I don't see how it can be helped. With the adoption rate soaring among teens and tweens, this is how we will be reaching many audiences in the future.

The cost can be quite minimal and the return is worthwhile. Now, with more and more competing non-profits coming online, the difficulties [a non-profit will face in developing] a successful campaign are growing.

The best idea is to be involved early. Changes in [on-line] search (especially as people will be able to conduct, focused, local searches for information) will likely help many non-profits see the benefits of going online. But, these changes will take time. So, I suggest getting involved early and establishing a presence.

*French On Healthcare Non-Profit Blogs*

**Q:** How do you feel blogging can help healthcare non-profits?

**A:** Awareness of your services is the initial benefit. After that, being able to share your own story and make it quite personal (with the added benefit of conversations thrown in) makes online social media quite valuable. There are so many mysteries and misperceptions about disabilities, blogs will offer more opportunities to tell individual stories and remove those misperceptions.

**Q:** Why do you feel many healthcare non-profits are reluctant to blog?

**A:** Yes, there are still worries about liability and exposure. Also, many organizations are fearful of

"loosing control" of their message. Awareness takes time. Soon they will see that social media gives them the opportunity to take control of their story in a very personal way.

**Q:** What would be your advice to any healthcare non-profit thinking about starting a blog?

**A:** Same thing I tell anyone thinking about starting a blog. Don't just dive right in and start writing a blog. Read blogs for a few months. Explore as many blogs and sites with similar themes and issues as the one you are thinking of writing.

Then, start the blog in the dark. By that I mean, start it privately and hidden from the public. Turn off the pinging tools that come with most blogs

and just write for about a month.<sup>14</sup> Get some posts under your wings so that you feel comfortable. Then go live.

Above all, have a passion about what you are writing. If you don't have that passion, don't blog. It isn't for everyone.

**Q:** Do you see any particular healthcare non-profits as being particularly well-suited to blogging? If so, why?

**A:** Some people think that some topics just aren't right for blogs. I don't necessarily agree. Recently I suggested to a hospice organization that they start blogging.

Think about it. If they can share all of the

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix I for the definition of "pinging."

wonderful stories of easing pain and easing the grief of patients and families, how can that hurt their business? I don't believe it can. But, the stories have to be genuine, truthful and sincere.

## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Throughout this report, we have explored the benefits, drawbacks and challenges of healthcare blogging. It is clear that – at least in the short-term – the healthcare blogosphere will remain healthy, vibrant and influential.

However, what does the future hold? Are healthcare blogs just a passing fad? Will pharmaceutical companies and other healthcare organizations ever embrace the technology?

At this point, there are no clear answers to these questions. However, based on what we know about the Internet and how blogging has affected other industries, it is possible to make some tentative predictions about the future of the healthcare blogosphere.

### *Prediction I: The Healthcare Blogosphere Will Shrink Over Time*

In October 2003, Perseus Development Corporation released a study indicating that a majority of blogs have small audiences and are quickly shuttered by their owners.[49]

This study suggests that that the healthcare blogosphere may shrink over time as people abandon blogging in favor of other pursuits.

### *Prediction II: The Healthcare Blogosphere Will Become Larger, But More Stratified*

It is also possible that the numbers of healthcare bloggers will increase for the foreseeable future. However, as has happened in other areas of the blogosphere, a group of high-profile bloggers may begin to capture the majority of attention.

If this happens, the healthcare blogosphere will become highly stratified, which may discourage people from starting blogs.

*Prediction III: Other Social Media Technologies Will Eventually Supplant Blogging*

Prominent blogger and marketing expert Steve Rubel has suggested that Weblogs will soon be supplanted by podcasting, consumer-generated videos and other Web 2.0 technologies.[50] Does this mean that healthcare bloggers will soon begin to embrace these communications vehicles?

This is unlikely. First, the healthcare industry has been slow to embrace blogs, which are now a mature technology. Second, few healthcare organizations, experts, physicians and others have started to incorporate new technologies like podcasting into their communications efforts.

**For Now, The Future Is Bright**

Whatever the long-term fortunes of the healthcare blogosphere, it is clear that it has already influenced how people receive and consume medical information. For now, its future is bright.

## Part III: Appendices

## APPENDIX I: BLOG GLOSSARY

Following are the definitions of some common blogging terms.

**Aggregator:** Software or a Web site that helps people collect and organize posts from different blogs.

**Archives:** Links to past blog entries, ordered by month, week or day.[51]

**Blog:** A Web site in which items are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order.[2]

**Blog Carnival:** A blog article on a specific subject containing links to other articles covering

the same topic. Carnivals highlight posts by frequent contributors and new entrants to the blogosphere.[52]

**Blogger:** A person who publishes a blog.[2]

**Blogging:** Authoring a blog, maintaining a blog or adding an article to an existing blog.[2]

**Blogosphere:** The community of blogs on the Web.[4]

**Blogroll:** A list of links to other blogs. A blogroll is usually located in the sidebar of a blog.[53]

**Categories:** Keywords and phrases that bloggers use to categorize their blog postings.[51]

**Comments:** Reader reactions to a blog posting.

**Comment Spam:** An off-topic comment posted on a blog to drive traffic to a commercial Web site.[53]

**Crisis Blog:** A company blog set up to handle a public relations crisis. This can be either to handle internal communications or to allow a company to present its side of a story in a frank, credible and *timely* manner when a situation is developing rapidly. [52]

**Dark Blog:** A non-public blog (i.e., an internal blog published by a company).[52]

**Journal Blog:** A personal diary-like blog. Personal journal blogs are the most common type of Weblog. Most have extremely small readerships.[53]

**Ping:** An alert distributed via the Internet that notifies the original author of a blog post when someone else writes an entry concerning the original post.[52]

**Post:** Individual articles on a blog.[2]

**RSS:** Really Simple Syndication, RDF Site Summary or Rich Site Summary is a method of describing news or other Web content that is available for "feeding" (distribution or syndication) from an online publisher to Web users.[54]

**Tagging:** The process of categorizing blog posts using certain terms or phrases.

**Trackback:** A system that allows a blogger to see who has written an article based on his or her post. The system works by sending a 'ping' between the blogs, and therefore providing the alert.[52]

## APPENDIX II: BLOGGING TIPS AND TOOLS

Following is a brief overview of how to start and maintain a blog. Also included is information on blog creation tools.

### Step I: Determine The Blog's Purpose

The key to starting and maintaining a successful blog is to determine its purpose. See the following chapters for more on this important topic:

- **Patient Blogs**
- **Healthcare Provider Blogs**
- **Healthcare Expert Blogs**
- **Healthcare Organizations and Blogs**
- **Healthcare Non-Profits and Blogs**

### Step II: Use A Blog Client Or Set Up A Blog On Your Organization's Server

Healthcare providers or experts considering starting a blog may wish to set up a Weblog using a free or subscription-based service. Some of the most popular services include:

- **Blogger**  
[www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)
- **MSN Spaces**  
<http://spaces.msn.com>
- **Wordpress**  
<http://wordpress.com>
- **TypePad**  
[www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)
- **MySpace**  
[www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

Individuals should also consider joining a blog network for increased exposure.

The Medical Blog Network ([www.healthvoices.com](http://www.healthvoices.com)) is a popular blog community that hosts blogs written by healthcare professionals.

Pharmaceutical/device makers, managed care organizations, hospitals and others should consider installing a blog on their Web server.

Popular blog software providers include:

- **Six Apart**  
[www.sixapart.com](http://www.sixapart.com)
- **Traction Software**  
[www.tractionsoftware.com](http://www.tractionsoftware.com)

Please note that there are benefits and drawbacks to using free subscription services or having the blog hosted on a Web server. Most importantly, with a free service you may not have as much control of the look and feel of the blog. However, setting up a blog on a Web server may require additional financial and human resources.

### Step III: Maintaining The Blog

- **Time Commitment:** Once a blog has been established, healthcare providers, experts and non-profits should expect to spend anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours a day researching and publishing content.

Given the rules and regulations governing many healthcare organization materials, developing and posting content may be time-intensive.

Healthcare organizations should consider developing policies and procedures to decrease time spent maintaining a blog.

- **Keeping Up:** It will be important to keep up with relevant news and postings by other bloggers. See Appendix III: Tracking the Healthcare Blogosphere for information on blog and news monitoring services.

## APPENDIX III: TRACKING THE HEALTHCARE BLOGOSPHERE

Following is a list of services and Web sites you can use to track, search and learn about the healthcare blogosphere.

### Blog Search/Analysis Tools

#### PubSub

[www.pubsub.com](http://www.pubsub.com)

PubSub uses a proprietary software engine to track blogosphere commentary about a variety of topics, including products, services, individuals and companies. PubSub delivers information about these topics via e-mail, PDA and other methods.

#### Google Blog Search

<http://blogsearch.google.com>

A Google service that enables users to search blog content for specific words and phrases.

#### Yahoo! Blog Search

<http://news.search.yahoo.com>

A special section of Yahoo! News that provides information from blogs on various topics.

#### Technorati

[www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)

Technorati is one of the Internet's most well-established blog search tools. Technorati tracks more than 30 million blogs every hour, providing information about what topics are being discussed, popular blogs and how blog dialogue has changed over time.

#### Feedster

[www.feedster.com](http://www.feedster.com)

Feedster tracks "feeds" or information updates from millions of blogs and media sources every hour.

### **BlogPulse**

[www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com)

BlogPulse is a blog search engine that enables users to:

- Search how often specific search terms are being discussed in the blogosphere
- Track conversations between bloggers on a specific topic
- Learn about specific bloggers by researching their profile
- Monitor popular topics

### **Bloglines**

[www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com)

Bloglines is a news aggregator service that tracks information updates from blogs, Web sites and other news sources.

### **Nielsen BuzzMetrics**

[www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com](http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com)

Nielsen BuzzMetrics offers a variety of

paid “word of mouth” tracking services. The company provides its clients with information about what bloggers, bulletin board participants and others are saying about various products, services and issues.

## **Healthcare Blog Information Sources**

### **The Medical Blog Network**

[www.healthvoices.com](http://www.healthvoices.com)

The Medical Blog Network is a Web site that contains a comprehensive listing of healthcare-related blogs.

This well-regarded Network also aggregates postings from these blogs and provides other communications services.

### **Medlogs**

[www.medlogs.com](http://www.medlogs.com)

Medlogs is a Web site that collects posts from various healthcare blogs. Medlogs

also contains a listing of healthcare bloggers.

### **Healthcare Blogs**

[www.healthcareblogs.com](http://www.healthcareblogs.com)

The Healthcare Blogs Web site collects recent postings from healthcare-related blogs. The Web site also features a listing of healthcare bloggers.

### **HITSphere**

[www.hitsphere.com](http://www.hitsphere.com)

A Web site that collects posts from healthcare information technology-related blogs.

### **Grand Rounds**

Grand Rounds is a blog “carnival” that is organized and hosted by a different blogger (usually a healthcare provider, consultant or patient) each week. The host of Grand Rounds is responsible for compiling and highlighting a selection of the best posts written by healthcare bloggers in the previous week.

A listing of past and upcoming installments of Ground Rounds can be found at:

<http://blogborygmi.blogspot.com/2004/09/grand-rounds-archive-upcoming-schedule.html>.

### **Health Wonk Review**

[www.healthwonkreview.com](http://www.healthwonkreview.com)

The Health Wonk Review is a new bi-weekly blog “carnival” that is written by a different healthcare blogger each week.

Organizers developed the event to highlight posts of healthcare bloggers writing about health policy.

### **Marketplace.MD Blog**

[http://marketplace.md/community/blogs/marketplace.md\\_blog/default.aspx](http://marketplace.md/community/blogs/marketplace.md_blog/default.aspx)

The author of this blog selects and highlights posts from healthcare policy and medical Weblogs several times a day.

**Soundpractice.Net**

[www.soundpractice.net](http://www.soundpractice.net)

The publisher of *the Journal of Practice Management* and a healthcare consultant produce a Weblog and podcasts (audio recordings) focusing on various issues relating to medical practice management.

The creators of the blog/podcast have interviewed a number of healthcare bloggers, including Matthew Holt, author of *The Health Care Blog* ([www.thehealthcareblog.com](http://www.thehealthcareblog.com)).

To listen to these interviews, please go to <http://www.soundpractice.net/custom.cfm?name=podcastArchives.cfm>

**APPENDIX IV:  
INFLUENTIAL HEALTHCARE BLOGS**

Following is a listing of some of the most influential patient, healthcare expert and provider blogs as of April 2006. Influence was measured by the following criteria:

- **Media Mentions:** How many times the blog received media coverage
- **References:** How frequently the blog was mentioned or linked to by other healthcare bloggers

Please note that this listing of influential blogs is far from complete and will change as the healthcare blogosphere evolves.

<b>Influential Healthcare Provider Blogs</b>
<b>Medpundit</b> <a href="http://medpundit.blogspot.com">http://medpundit.blogspot.com</a>
<b>Grunt Doc</b> <a href="http://www.gruntdoc.com">www.gruntdoc.com</a>
<b>Kevin, MD</b> <a href="http://www.kevinmd.com/blog">www.kevinmd.com/blog</a>
<b>A Chance To Cut Is A Chance To Cure</b> <a href="http://www.cut-to-cure.blogspot.com">www.cut-to-cure.blogspot.com</a>
<b>Barbados Butterfly</b> <a href="http://barbadosbutterfly.blogspot.com">http://barbadosbutterfly.blogspot.com</a>
<b>NHS Blog Doctor</b> <a href="http://nhsblogdoc.blogspot.com">http://nhsblogdoc.blogspot.com</a>
<b>The Cheerful Oncologist</b> <a href="http://thecheerfuloncologist.blogspot.com">http://thecheerfuloncologist.blogspot.com</a>
<b>Blogborygmi</b> <a href="http://blogborygmi.blogspot.com">http://blogborygmi.blogspot.com</a>
<b>DB's Medrants</b> <a href="http://www.medrants.com">www.medrants.com</a>

**Influential Patient Blogs**

**Diabetes Mine**  
[www.diabetesmine.com](http://www.diabetesmine.com)

**Mary's Breast Cancer Blog**  
[www.beaverislandarts.com/index.php?id=29](http://www.beaverislandarts.com/index.php?id=29)

**The Cancer Blog**  
[www.thecancerblog.com](http://www.thecancerblog.com)

**A Difficult Patient**  
<http://www.xanga.com/difficultpt/432681853/item.html>

**Healthy Concerns**  
[www.healthyconcerns.com](http://www.healthyconcerns.com)

**CrazyMeds**  
[www.crazymeds.org](http://www.crazymeds.org)

**Influential Healthcare Expert Blogs**

**The Health Care Blog**  
[www.thehealthcareblog.com](http://www.thehealthcareblog.com)

**Healthy Policy**  
<http://healthypolicy.typepad.com/blog>

**Pharma Marketing Blog**  
<http://pharmamkting.blogspot.com>

**Managed Care Matters**  
[www.joepaduda.com](http://www.joepaduda.com)

**The Healthcare IT Guy**  
[www.healthcareguy.com](http://www.healthcareguy.com)

**The Rhetoric Of Me**  
<http://therhetoricofme.blogspot.com>

**In The Pipeline**  
<http://pipeline.corante.com>

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## ABOUT ENVISION SOLUTIONS

Envision Solutions, LLC is a full-service healthcare marketing communications consulting firm. We focus on providing innovative products and services to not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. We exist to help make our clients more efficient and successful.

Envision Solutions' core competencies are in the areas of analysis, strategic/tactical recommendation development, training and content development.

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