Background

- Social media is “an enabler of public health engagement and improvement” through educating patients on healthcare issues, organizing communities to find and resolve health care problems, as well as offering new solutions to health problems.

- Study of pharmacists in Catalonia, Spain:
  - 16% have a personal blog
  - 21% have a group website
  - 48% have a personal website
  - 93% use internet for job-related purposes

- Study of pharmacists in the U.S.:
  - 18% are rural
  - 18% are small urban
  - 45% are metropolitan

Methodology

- Sample size: 1196 independent community pharmacists
- Data collection: mail questionnaire with an option to complete online
- Survey: 2.5-minute survey instrument with questions addressing the objectives of the study.
- Respondent: pharmacist
- Purpose for internet use: professional purposes
  - 47% share information with other professionals
  - 19% share information with patients
  - 9% spread their own scientific papers to the scientific community
- Respondent’s professional organization affiliation

Key Study Objectives:

1. Determine the extent (face of) community pharmacists use text messaging, email, Facebook, Twitter and other social media for professional communication (patients, pharmacists, other healthcare professionals).
2. Identify perceptions of community pharmacists towards using social media for patient pharmacist communication.
3. Determine the extent in independent pharmacists have developed and employed their pharmacy websites for the provision of drug information and patient care services.

Objective #1 Results

- To reach a healthcare professional: 50% used email
- To reach a patient: 36% used email
- To reach a patient: 47% used text message

Objective #2 Results

- Pharmacists’ Perceptions towards Use of Social Media
  - In general, the majority (76%) of pharmacists think that social media can effectively be used to provide medicines information (22.9%) and tips on being compliant (19.7%).
  - Pharmacies can use social media (Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Blogs) to better understand the patterns of internet and social media use for professional purposes.
  - More studies in other states as well as nationwide are warranted to better understand the patterns of internet and social media use in daily professional activities of community pharmacists.

Some Qualitative Data

- “I use YouTube to show how to use inhalers and website to provide information on medicines.”
- “It depends on the pharmacy location. When a pharmacy is located at a low income area, contacting and communication with patients and/or other social networks for professional communication (patients, pharmacists, other healthcare professionals) is rather difficult. This pharmacy is located in a low income area, all Medicaid or welfare, they cannot afford having a computer or they do not have access to internet on a daily basis to check their email, Facebook or Twitter. This pharmacy is located in a low income area, contacting and communication with patients only by phone.”
- “I’m frequently 4 to 5 times a week answering drug questions over the phone.”
- “I would like to use social media in my pharmacy more. However, I do not have time and none of my employees seem to have the knowledge.”

Conclusion/Implications

Overall, Texas independent pharmacists’ use of social media for professional purposes is moderate with 56% and 36% of pharmacists using email for communication with healthcare professionals and patients, respectively. In addition, 45% and 48% of the pharmacists use text messaging for healthcare professional and patient communication, respectively. Due to overall positive perceptions towards use of social media in a professional setting (over 75% of pharmacists think that social media can effectively be used to improve patient communication), its use may be further expanded through pharmacist training and education.

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