

Chapter 4

Community Sites: Facebook, Google+ and Medical Social Networks

Practicing medicine is teamwork. While 86 % of medical professionals use the Internet to access health information, 92 % of them access it from their office [1]; and 71 % of them use community sites [2]. One of the main reasons for using a community sites is that the person with the right answer for our question is not always present in the clinical setting therefore turning to the online world is a fast and potentially accurate alternative, although it has limitations.

Community sites usually bear with the following features:

- users have to register through a login system
- users can create profiles for themselves
- users can submit content including text or media files
- users can comment on each other's content
- groups can be created
- private and public messaging is possible
- users can search in the submitted content

There are potential advantages and disadvantages of using community sites for professional purposes (Table 4.1).

Basically there are two types of community sites which medical professionals can use for work-related purposes such as medical and non-medical community sites. Differences between the two types are summarized in Table 4.2.

TABLE 4.1 Potential advantages and disadvantages of using community sites in medicine

Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
Accessing information quickly	Accuracy of information is questionable
Finding new contacts	Each user profile has to be assessed
Free to use	Users are hardly motivated to contribute
Information is stored	Storage must comply with laws
Clinical cases can be shared	Privacy rights of patients might be compromised

TABLE 4.2 Differences between medical and non-medical community sites

	Community sites	Medical community sites
Registration	Anyone can register	Only medical professionals and students can register who must provide credentials
Focus areas	Non-specific	It can be medical specialty-specific
Language	Usually English	It can be language or country-specific
Policy	Common privacy policy	Privacy policy with a special focus on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

Non-medical Community Sites

Using Facebook as a Medical Professional

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) is the world's largest community site with over one billion users [3]. Users have to register and create a personal profile, after which they can connect or "become friends" with other users, exchange messages and become members of groups or followers of pages. Based on a survey of 4,000 physicians, 61 % of them use Facebook for personal; and 15 % of them use it for professional purposes. Moreover, 33 % of physicians have received

friend requests from their patients on Facebook and only 75 % of them declined the request [4]. Therefore the basic technical details and privacy issues have to be discussed.

Status updates as text messages, links, photos and videos can be shared on the timeline of a user which are meant to be seen only by the friends of the user which is not always the case. Even if the professional and personal lives are separated on Facebook, users should be aware of all the privacy settings that can be accessed under Settings – Privacy settings.

Details users should check before using Facebook:

- Who can see the content the user publishes (anyone, only friends, only the user or only customized groups).
- Whether the content the user was tagged in is published on the user's timeline without review.
- Who can look the user up using the e-mail address and phone number provided in the profile.
- Whether the timeline of the users appears in search engines.
- Who can publish content on the user's timeline.

If Facebook is used for professional purposes, the following settings are recommended to be used.

- Secure browsing should be used which can be accessed via Settings – Security.
- Only friends should see the content the user publishes.
- Content in which the user is tagged in should be reviewed before appearing on the timeline.
- Only friends should be able to look the user up using the e-mail address and phone number provided in the profile.
- The profile should not appear in search engines.
- Nobody should be allowed to publish content on the user's timeline.

Before a user posts content on the timeline, the people the content is shared with can be set through a small icon below the post (Table 4.3).

Facebook applications usually require access to the timeline, messages, friend list or even more details of the user,

TABLE 4.3 Privacy settings of posts published on Facebook

The setting of the post	The content is shared with
Public	Anyone
Friends	Only those users we became friends with
Only me	Only the user who made the post
Custom	A specified group of users
Groups	Existing groups
Friends of friends	The group of users cannot be specified

therefore the list of apps that have been given such access should be reviewed and access should be revoked via Settings – Apps settings.

In order to make sure only a specified group of users can see the post published by us, groups can be created under Groups – Create a group. The group must be named and members can be added immediately out of the friends the user already has. There are three options for the privacy settings of the group such as open (anyone can see the group, its members and the posts); closed (anyone can see the group and its members, but only members can see the posts); and secret (only members can see the group, its members and the posts).

For medical groups, the secret option should be chosen.

What if a Patient Sends a Friendship Request to His/Her Doctor on Facebook?

If the doctor's Facebook profile is personal, the request should be declined and a private message should be sent to the patient explaining the reasons. As the patient-doctor relationship is professional, it should not be mixed with a personal online profile.

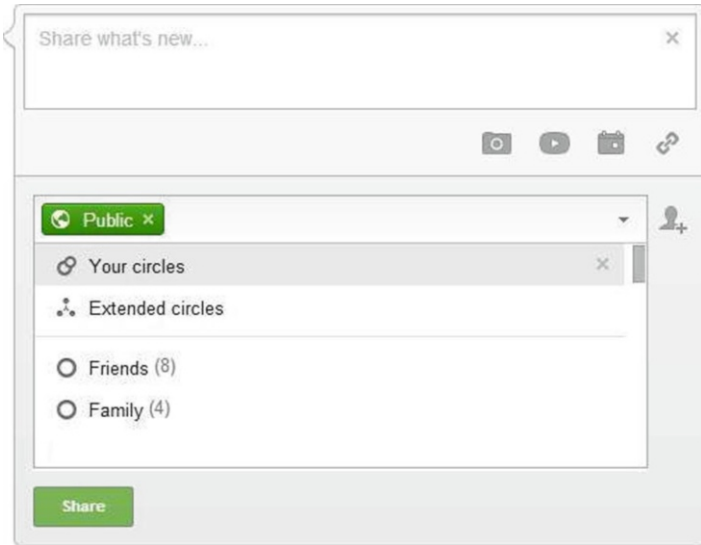


FIGURE 4.1 Privacy settings of posts on Google+

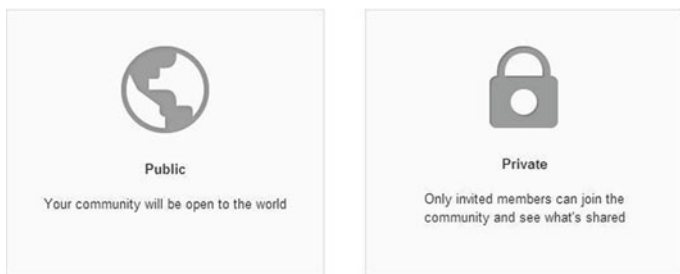
Using Google+ for Medical Purposes

Google+ (<http://plus.google.com>) is the community site launched by Google in 2011 having over 500 million registered users. It is described by Google as a social layer consisting of several layers that cover the online services and properties of Google. A clear difference compared to Facebook is the way Google+ makes it simple to use privacy settings while publishing content on the site.

Groups of users are called circles and can be created and defined by users. Posts can be shared with anyone (public), specific users or specific circles (Fig. 4.1).

Communities are the equivalent of Facebook groups in which users can follow ongoing conversations about particular topics. Communities can be public and private which only allows invited members to join the community and see the content. If public is chosen, it has to be decided

What kind of community are you making?



[Learn more about privacy](#)

Cancel

Create community

FIGURE 4.2 Creating a Google+ community

whether users need permission to join the community. If the private option is chosen, it has to be defined whether users can search for the community and ask for permission to join (Fig. 4.2).

Google Hangouts facilitate group video chat and can be launched by Google+ users. There are regular international clinical case presentations initiated via Google Hangouts which can easily be used for such purposes.

Using LinkedIn for Maintaining Professional Relationships

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) is a social networking site launched in 2003 intended for people in professional occupations and contact with any user requires an existing relationship which is meant to build trust among users.

Curriculum vitae can be uploaded including workplaces, profile image, education, experience, awards, skills, interests and recommendations. A public profile with a short link can

be created when the curriculum vitae is successfully uploaded. This link can substitute an own website as well.

Using Groups on Friendfeed for Archived Communication

FriendFeed (<http://www.friendfeed.com>) is a real-time aggregator of updates from social media resources such as blogs, community sites or microblogging services, among others. Groups related to specific topics can be created such as the Doctors, Students, & Health Care Professionals group launched for the blogs, Twitter feeds and other channels of medical professionals and students.

Medical Community Sites

There are community sites specifically created by and for medical professionals. These sites require credentials or copy of diploma during registration and content published on the social networks can only be accessed by registered users (Table 4.4).

Choosing the right community site is not an easy decision but numerous factors can facilitate this process such as:

- language of the social networking site
- the main topics it covers (research or medical specialties)
- the size of the community
- whether images, videos and clinical cases can be uploaded
- the privacy settings (how closed the community is)

The key factors when using medical or non-medical community sites are that patient privacy when clinical cases are shared should be respected and privacy settings should be analyzed in details.

A typical registration process is shown by using the example of Sermo, a US based community site. Users must specify their credential, name, e-mail address, street address, city, state, zip code, date of birth and the last four digits of the social security number.

TABLE 4.4 Medical community sites

Name and URL of social network	Basic features	Topics or specialty
Ozmosis (http://www.ozmosis.com)	A private and secure community for US based physicians	Not specialty-based
Dxy (http://www.dxy.cn)	A Chinese community with over two million members	Not specialty-based
Sermo (http://www.sermo.com)	The largest US based community	Not specialty-based
Doctors Hangout (http://www.doctorshangout.com)	A professional community with personal activities involved	Not specialty-based
Doctors.net.uk (http://www.doctors.net.uk)	The largest UK based medical community site	Not specialty-based
Nature Network (http://network.nature.com)	A social networking site for scientists organized by Nature.com	Not specialty-based
CMA (http://www.cma.ca)	Canadian medical community	Not specialty-based
EchoJournal (http://www.echjournal.org)	Video channel and community about echocardiology	Echocardiography
New Media Medicine (http://www.newmediamedicine.com)	A New Zealand based community site	Not specialty-based
Doctrs (http://www.doctrs.com)	A community site for finding coworkers and colleagues	Not specialty-based
Medcrowd (http://www.medcrowd.com)	A medical community for everyone working in healthcare	Not specialty-based
Esanum (http://www.esanum.com)	A multi-lingual (German, French and Spanish) medical community	Not specialty-based

A few tips for assessing the quality of basically any types of online medical resources:

- It should be easy to find out who runs the website
- It should be clear who pays for the website or if it is non-profit
- The purpose/mission statement of the website should be described
- The original source of the website's information should be available
- It should be easy to tell where the information comes from
- Time and date of the articles as well as the information included in them should be stated

Self-Test

1. Is using community sites as doctors safe?
If the professional and personal profiles are separated and it is used with strategy, it should be safe.
2. What are the main differences between medical and non-medical community sites?
Medical ones require credentials at registration and has features specifically designed for medical professionals.
3. What are the most popular community sites?
Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn.

Next Steps

1. Check your already existing profiles in social networking sites and see whether you mix personal and professional content.
2. Check the list of medical community sites and see whether there are any of them being relevant to your needs, language or specialty.
3. Try to find medical groups on Facebook, Google+ and other non-medical social networks.

Key Points

- There are medical and non-medical community sites.
- Medical communities require credentials and only medical professionals can use them.
- Patients usually contact their physicians on non-medical communities such as Facebook or Google+.
- Professional and personal community profiles of medical professionals should be clearly separated.
- LinkedIn is a decent community site to publish an online CV.

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