



The Rise of Blogs in Nursing Practice

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The number of blogs and related online activities continues to grow exponentially each year. Patients increasingly are turning to the Internet for personalized, timely, and relevant health information; blogs remain a large source of that information. Nurses and other healthcare professionals can harness the informational, educational, networking, and supportive power of blogs, as well, and should understand how to access and use blogs for professional use.

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And lately, the faces of the uninsured are morphing in front of me. They aren't dressed in dirty socks and flannel shirts. Now I see unfunded patients with expensive college degrees who used to have jobs, and they are parents of a child or two, as lay-offs create a new kind of uninsured patient. Will I be asked to choose which kind of unfunded patient gets care, as resources dry up? This is the moral monster underneath the bed I fear, and even with the lights turned on; it's not my imagination.

—JParadisiRN, 2011

About 450 million English-language weblogs, or “blogs,” are estimated to exist, though the exact number is difficult to determine because of the number of blogs created and deleted daily, as well as the number of inactive blogs currently in existence (Haynes, 2010). With free, user-friendly software such as WordPress and Blogger enabling anyone to create and host a blog, the blogosphere, or world of blogs, continues to grow rapidly. Blog is also a verb, meaning to write or update posts in a blog site. Nine percent of all adults within the United States blog and 24% read blogs (Smith, 2008). Fourteen percent of U.S. children aged 12–17 years who use the Internet have blogs, and, as of 2010, the Pew Research Center

found blog postings by younger bloggers had dropped since the previous survey in 2008, as the number of microblogging sites increased (Kopytoff, 2011). Specifically, blogs related to the health industry are a growing phenomenon (Miller & Pole, 2010).

My blogging adventure started as I cautiously and occasionally began to read blogs about topics of interest. I did not think I could add one more information source, as I already had a growing tower of paper information precariously balanced on the corner of my desk. Sometimes, I likened the blogosphere to a “blob”—an amorphous creature growing bigger and bigger as it consumes everything in its path. Quite frankly, I thought blogs were just too much for me. However, any sort of status update via Facebook, Twitter, or any type of wiki page already made me a micrologger. I was sharing information with the world. No longer did colleagues have to search for me to hear about my institution's central line dressing change policy; I was pushing this information out to others, and vice versa. The same is true for everyone. Information is gathered from a variety of sources, and blogging is simply another way to get that information.

Prevalence of Blogs

The flow of information changed during the last decade with the rise of interconnectedness via blogs, social networks, and rapidly changing technology. Not that long ago, people would sit down at a computer and go the Internet to visit their favorite Web sites and obtain the information they needed or wanted. That has changed. Now, because of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, information available from favorite sources, including blogs, is sent directly to an RSS reader, such as Google™ Reader, or straight to an e-mail inbox. Microblogging platforms such as Twitter provide updates in 140 characters or less, often breaking news faster than mainstream media. With more than 845 million active users worldwide communicating in more than 70 languages, Facebook, the simple status update social media giant, is integrated into nearly seven million applications and Web sites via “Likes,” comments, and link-sharing (Facebook, 2012). Blogs are now a main current within the continuous and direct information stream.

Although limited data exist on the number of nurses and other healthcare professionals blogging and reading blogs, Buis and Carpenter (2009) found that blog content tended to vary by blogger credentials and blog host. For example, WebMD blogs were authored solely by credentialed healthcare professionals and contained substantial health information as opposed to responses to media and current events, whereas independently hosted healthcare blogs were authored by a mix of credentialed and noncredentialed bloggers and contained far less medical information and more posts in response to mainstream media topics (Buis & Carpenter, 2009). In another study, Miller and Pole (2010) examined 951 health-related blogs. They