14.4: Social Networking

Types

Social networking refers to any web-based or mobile platform that allow users to create and share conversations or content with other users or the public. Many types of social networking tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, focus on communicating with an established group of people, often those who are already known to each other. Another form of social networking, LinkedIn, helps to expand professional contacts as users make new connections online. Other popular social networking tools, such as YouTube, allow users to upload videos for public viewing. Each of these tools is presently being used in health care to: (1) connect clients with other clients dealing with the same health condition, (2) connect health care providers with other health care providers, or (3) connect health care providers with clients and families. For example, health care providers can use Twitter to monitor epidemics (e.g., searches can be performed to monitor tweets about influenza). YouTube can be used to educate clients about diet or even help them prepare for a surgery. These are only a few examples of how social networking can benefit client care.

Privacy Concerns

It is important to consider the legal and ethical obstacles—along with any associated risks and responsibilities—of incorporating social media into nursing practice. Social networking technology must be used appropriately, respectfully, and safely. Registered nurses must reflect on the CNA’s Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses (2017) which states that registered nurses must “safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of persons and other colleagues” (p. 21). Nurses must be aware of any applicable federal and provincial legislation such as the right to privacy and confidentiality of personal and health information (Sewell, 2016). In Saskatchewan, the Health Information Protection Act (HIPA) discusses the protection of electronic health information (Government of Saskatchewan, 2003).
Significant breaches of confidentiality have occurred when nurses posted comments, pictures, or videos that contain sufficient detail to identify a patient. Health care providers need to realize that posting anonymously or under a pseudonym does not protect the user against a breach of confidentiality or defamation of character (CNPS, 2012). Furthermore, nurses need to respect professional boundaries when becoming a “friend” or communicating health information, which may lead to personal liability if the nurse identifies him or herself as a nurse.

Research Note


Abstract

The management and prevention of cardiovascular disease is a significant challenge to the health care system, both nationally and internationally. Web-based tools are used by many health care professionals and health care organizations to communicate with patients, to collaborate with other health professionals, and to provide health information. This interpretive description research study explored the factors that have influenced and will continue to influence or contribute to caregivers’ use of social networking as a form of social support when a family member is learning to live well with heart failure. The researcher created, designed, and developed a social networking site for caregivers. Following focus group sessions with health care professionals, the Living Well with Heart Failure NING site was reviewed and approved for use. Six caregivers participated on the website and were interviewed before and after participation.

The results of this research study have implications for regional health authorities, health care professionals, and caregivers of patients living with heart failure. Health care professionals are encouraged to provide caregivers and patients with a variety of teaching materials both in print and electronically. Health care professionals should be encouraged to participate in web-based forums to share their experiences and learn from other health care professionals, caregivers, and patients living with heart failure. Such experiences can help new graduate nurses learn from more experienced nurses as regional health authorities can develop networks related to specific areas of practice. This will have many benefits as health care professionals can share medical research with each other as well as caregivers and patients.