Regulating social media for accessing healthcare information

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Social Media (SM) has changed the landscape of people to people communication by removing barriers and facilitating direct communication between parties. SM is popular mostly among youth but has also been useful to other strata of society. Broadly, SM refers to the latest web 2.0 interactive websites and services.[1] This includes different social networking sites, blogs, content hosting sites and virtual communities[2] to name a few. Through SM, users have the flexibility to generate their own content such as a webpage, blogpost, in addition to using Facebook, Twitter and similar SM platforms. The generation of such user content may not be possible with traditional media. In addition, SM provides freedom to share one's experiences with others. SM has left behind the old model of one to one communication and changed it into one to many or many to many. Social networks also act as powerful marketing channels.[1]

Although the use of SM is beneficial, it must be carefully used for sharing and discussing health information. The use of SM for health care has empowered patients, physicians and healthcare service providers alike.[3] With greater number of patients seeking information about their healthcare online and engaging in two-way conversations with care providers and other patients, the healthcare industry, including the pharmaceutical industry, have enormous responsibility.[4] The pharmaceutical industry, like any other industry, uses SM to reach target audience which includes physicians, patients and care providers. It is not behind in using SM

and leveraging its advantages. However, the pace at which the pharmaceutical industry has adopted social media for communicating with healthcare users and providers seem to be slower than other industries.

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