

From the President:

Communication in the 21st Century: “The Blog”

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If you are like most physicians, the word “blog” is likely to conjure up pictures of aliens on the prowl for new worlds to conquer. However, I have come to realize that instead, it is one of the greatest communication methods ever invented.

In April, I pointed out how hard it is to change the minds of people who are set in their ways. But there are many others who can be reached, and the blog is a great way to do it. Blogs reach literally millions of people all over the world, and these people are crying out for physicians to be involved in the “health care” debate.

“Blog” stands for web log, in which anyone can write a journal or diary and publish it as a website to be read by anyone with a computer. While it is obvious that these personal web pages cannot be counted, an estimate of 30 to 100 million is easily believable.

There are free sites where blogs can be started.¹ I created one as a test in 20 minutes using the blogger tool,² and am now shamelessly promoting it here. Please visit my personal website (<http://kellenmedblogspot.com>), and leave me a comment. If I get enough responses, I can sell advertising and make a few dollars.

Seriously though, to grow a blog that garners a lot of attention is hard work, and in many ways it is a business that requires much attention. Few of us have time for this, but fortunately, there is something much easier that all of us can accomplish.

The next time you read an article online, look for a button that says “comments” or “leave a reply.” What you have stumbled upon is also referred to as blogging, but in this environment all you need to do is leave your thoughts on the subject in the article. There is no work, no website maintenance, just free conversation with anyone who chooses to visit that particular page. You will find examples on the AAPS website, www.aapsonline.org, especially in the “News of the Day” feature.

In addition, you can actively look for topics that interest you by searching the web. The number of sites is absolutely astounding. Pick your favorite search engine and type in a topic such as “health care reform blogs.” My result was 7,790,000 hits.

As the late-night infomercials say, “But wait, there’s more!” Many other sites are essentially blogs, but they have different names. Digg is an example of a blog run by “the community”—the people who choose to participate in it. Individuals can vote thumbs up or down as to whether a story lives or dies. I confess I am still learning, but apparently many articles have little buttons that say, “Digg this article,” and this will send it to the Digg location for others to evaluate. Even if you cannot make this part work, proceed to the Digg site (www.digg.com), sign in, and begin commenting on virtually anything you want.

What I found great about Digg is that after I signed in, it created a homepage for me with a listing of topics I commented on. This makes

it easy to go back and see whether you stirred up passion in someone, who then felt compelled to agree or disagree with you. These sites do not appear to be for the faint of heart, though. You will be the victim of much abuse if you disagree with certain people. Anonymity can bring out the worst in some people.

There is even a blog for physicians known as Medscape (www.medscape.com). The topics range from medicine to politics, and theoretically you are only communicating with physicians. The conversation can in one thread be about the best anesthetic practices for sleep apnea sufferers, and the next thread could be about socialized medicine. To find this on the site, navigate to “viewpoints” and then “PhysicianConnect.” Click on “all discussions,” and away you go. As before, look out for some very nasty comments at times.

Now I would like to give you some practical pointers and etiquette items. Doctors are incredibly important in our national debate on “health care reform.” The population will listen to what doctors have to say, and if the wrong message gets sent out because only the socialists participate, then we as physicians, and all of America, will suffer.

The first step is to tell your story. Let the public know how all of the Washington regulations or insurance company policies affect your practice on a daily basis. For cash-based practices (patient-direct model), talk about variable payment plans, about being able to legally give discounts or charge nothing; talk about overhead and time spent with patients. The point is to let people out there know that an alternative exists to government or third-party control over their lives, and that it functions well all over this country.

I did find a couple of websites that specifically teach blogging;^{3,4} there are certainly thousands more. I will share some useful comments from these sites.

Use links in your posts. Everywhere you go, put the AAPS website at the bottom of the post, provided you follow all the etiquette guidelines. We do not want our name associated with foul language. The more our link is posted, and the higher we go on search engines, the more likely people are to find us.

Yes, you do have time to do this. You do not need to write a thesis for a post. Simply state something in one sentence, such as: “Health insurance does not equal access to medical care, see the Massachusetts example” and then give a link to AAPS that discusses the topic. We have dozens of topics on our website, so spread them around. This can be done in minutes a day. Short and frequent beats long and infrequent every time.

Do not be shy about sharing your ideas; you cannot predict ahead of time what will resonate with various people. In the same vein, do not be afraid to disagree with the “experts”; they are often wrong. Please be creative in expressing your ideas, as we need to say things in more than one way. Not everyone will understand a message from a given perspective, so vary the perspective for maximum impact.

Lastly, and most importantly, please be polite and do not resort to name calling, no matter what someone else says. Name calling is the refuge of those who have lost the argument because they have no ideas.

Years ago Dale Carnegie wrote his famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.⁵ If you have never read it, I highly recommend doing so. Page 200 has a wonderful summary entitled "In a Nutshell," which contains 12 principles for effective communication.

Also, a good biography of Winston Churchill is worth your time. The man's life was filled with more setbacks than any 10 great men in history, yet he never lost faith in his mission of liberty. He always picked himself up and did whatever it took to advance the cause in which he believed. At this time in history, we watch the events unfolding in Washington and can be easily discouraged. Winston Churchill stands as a great role model.

The bottom line is, get out there and start blogging. We are the soldiers on the front line, and if we do not rise up to support freedom, then tyranny will rule the day. Winston Churchill in 1941 said it best:

"This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in."⁶

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