

# Twitter and health care -- can a tweet a day keep the doctor away?

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Twitter, the increasingly popular social networking tool that was at first merely a convenient way to stay in touch with friends and family, is emerging as a potentially valuable means of real-time, on-the-go communication of healthcare information and medical alerts, as described in a feature article in the Medical Connectivity section of the latest issue of *Telemedicine and e-Health*, a peer-reviewed journal published by Mary Ann Liebert, and the official journal of the American Telemedicine Association.

Physician groups, hospitals, and healthcare organizations are discovering a range of beneficial applications for using Twitter to communicate timely information both within the medical community and to patients and the public. Short messages, or "tweets," delivered through Twitter go out from a sender to a group of recipients simultaneously, providing a fast and easy way to reach a lot of people in a short time. This has obvious advantages for sharing time-critical information such as disaster alerts and drug safety warnings, tracking [disease outbreaks](#), or disseminating healthcare information. Twitter applications are available to help patients find out about clinical trials, for example, or to link brief news alerts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reliable websites that provide more detailed information.

The use of social media and Internet-based outlets such as Twitter to communicate medical information requires a high degree of caution, however, to preserve confidentiality and patient privacy in the clinical care setting, and to ensure that information sources are accurate, reliable,

and current.

"One way to look at Twitter is as a method of mass communication," says Joseph C. Kvedar, MD, Director of the Center for Connected Health (Partners [Healthcare System](#), Boston, MA), who is quoted in the article. [Twitter](#) is real-time and was designed for mobility, notes Dr. Kvedar. It allows people to "text 30 people or 50 or 100 people, whatever the number is who are following you."

More information: The feature article is available free online at [www.liebertpub.com/tmj](http://www.liebertpub.com/tmj)

Source: Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.

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