

# Can social media solve the US healthcare crisis?

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The creation of a social media videoconferencing platform geared towards healthcare might pave the way for enhanced use of social media in the world of healthcare according to a study published this month in the *International Journal of Electronic Finance*.

Peter DeVries of the Department of Finance, [Accounting](#), and CIS, at the University of Houston – Downtown, explains that despite the advent of social media tools and accessible mobile communications devices, the patient-doctor relationship has changed little. DeVries suggests that innovative use of social media might improve that relationship as well as the healthcare industry as a whole not only by reducing inefficiencies but by making healthcare provision and advice more immediate and engaging at lower cost. DeVries suggests that from the perspective of healthcare providers social media might also open up new revenue streams that could bolster an industry currently in economic turmoil.

DeVries points out that many industries are using social media to improve the customer and user experience and to provide social interaction among like-minded individuals. The popularity of Twitter and Facebook, which is fast approaching 1 billion worldwide users, is testament to the power social media might wield and the opportunities it could bring. "We are seeing companies linking to social media sites from their corporate websites to form closer relationships with their customers," says DeVries. In his paper, he offers healthcare providers several pointers as to how they might engage their customers, the [patients](#), through social media with a view to not only improving medical

provision but improving the company finances too.

Two aspects of social media that might revolutionize healthcare provision lie in the relationships between patients, the relationships between [physicians](#) and perhaps most importantly the relationships between the two. If [social media](#) can enable patients to share information with other patients and to gain knowledge and at the same time give physicians the ability to share and learn from their peers more readily, then the meshing of these two threads could make for better informed connections between patients and their physicians too.

DeVries cites the Association of American Medical Colleges on how there is likely to be a 124,000 shortfall of full-time physicians in the USA by 2025, while there will be a need for almost 140,000 family physicians by 2020 if Americans are to have adequate access to primary healthcare.

The projected shortage of physicians demands innovation in the healthcare industry, says DeVries. "Doctors and hospitals must find ways to provide healthcare in more productive and efficient ways," he adds. "If a growing number of patients are finding themselves as users of Web 2.0, then Web 2.0 might be the answer to alleviate the forecasted overcrowding."

**More information:** DeVries, "Electronic social media in the healthcare industry" in *International Journal of Electronic Finance*, 2012, 6, 49-61

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