The Rise of Blogs in Nursing Practice

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The number of blogs and related online activities continues to grow exponentially each year. Patients increasingly are turning to the Internet for personalized, timely, and relevant health information; blogs remain a large source of that information. Nurses and other healthcare professionals can harness the informational, educational, networking, and supportive power of blogs, as well, and should understand how to access and use blogs for professional use.

Prevalence of Blogs

The flow of information changed during the last decade with the rise of interconnectedness via blogs, social networks, and rapidly changing technology. Not that long ago, people would sit down at a computer and go the Internet to visit their favorite Web sites and obtain the information they needed or wanted. That has changed. Now, because of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, information available from favorite sources, including blogs, is sent directly to an RSS reader, such as Google™ Reader, or straight to an e-mail inbox. Microblogging platforms such as Twitter provide updates in 140 characters or less, often breaking news faster than mainstream media. With more than 845 million active users worldwide communicating in more than 70 languages, Facebook, the simple status update social media giant, is integrated into nearly seven million applications and Web sites via “Likes,” comments, and link-sharing (Facebook, 2012). Blogs are now a main current within the continuous and direct information stream.

Although limited data exist on the number of nurses and other healthcare professionals blogging and reading blogs, Buis and Carpenter (2009) found that blog content tended to vary by blogger credentials and blog host. For example, WebMD blogs were authored solely by credentialed healthcare professionals and contained substantial health information as opposed to responses to media and current events, whereas independently hosted healthcare blogs were authored by a mix of credentialed and noncredentialed bloggers and contained far less medical information and more posts in response to mainstream media topics (Buist & Carpenter, 2009).

In another study, Miller and Pole (2010) examined 951 health-related blogs. They