

Health Policy Forum

BeWell.com – The Value of Social Media in Health Communication

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Social media has become pervasive in today's society. Blogs, forums, social networks, and virtual worlds are easily accessed and attract many users. Consumer health information has become increasingly prevalent in a variety of media formats, and has become especially significant in social media. How health information delivered through social media affects prevention, behavior change, decision-making, knowledge, and health perceptions is the fundamental question in the quest to reach consumers.

Cheryl Heiks is Director of Communications and Events of LLuminari Inc, an innovative health communications company located in Wilmington, Delaware. LLuminari is the parent company for BeWell.com, the first expert-guided social network on health. LLuminari Inc. was founded by the internationally renowned experts, Dr. Nancy Snyderman, Dr. Susan Love, and Elizabeth

Browning. This dream team of over thirty of America's leading health and wellness experts was launched in *O, The Oprah Magazine* with a 12-month editorial series. Their vision is to give consumers easier access to health experts with reliable information. The company focuses on women's health issues, but also includes pediatrics, family health, and recently, men's health. From the beginning, the company was grounded in its commitment to multicultural health. LLuminari focuses on consulting work; live and on-line events; content; products for consumers; and landmark research studies.

LLuminari launched BeWell.com in December 2008. The site is designed to offer networks of communities focused on specific health care topics, with access to a panel of medical experts. It also offers resources, such as articles, blogs, online tools and videos. What makes BeWell

special is its ability to offer current cutting-edge, transparent information through postings, and conversations with leading experts. BeWell users appear to be very interested in the topics such as infertility, breast cancer, care giving, smoking cessation and heart disease. BeWell.com is a fascinating hybrid example of how social networking can blend with consumer health information (factual and evidence-based)—guided by medical experts. Though conversations between users can be fluid, users cannot get lost in a maze of inaccurate information.

Cheryl Heiks discussed the future of social media which she feels will emphasize the mobile device as the primary connection tool to the internet. She also described the continuum of blurred lines between business and social media which can be both complex and beneficial at the same time. ■