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# The Implementation of a Health Blog at a Community College

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## **Introduction of the Problem**

Many universities and community colleges offer a variety of health care services to students through campus-based centers. A rural, public community college located in the Midwest, has a health clinic that is open to staff, students, and members of the community. Patients can either pre-schedule appointments or walk in to see a Nurse Practitioner if there is an open appointment. However, student knowledge and use of the health services has been identified as being sub optimal. Advertising methods for the clinic services that were in place prior to this project included a short mention during freshman orientation, posters on bulletin boards, and the college's website. During the initial investigation of the problem it was found that no records were available to indicate how many students were using the clinic. It was suggested that finding a better way to reach the students could potentially increase the students' awareness of the clinic and possibly increase their use. Through several meetings with the clinical staff, administration, and Media Department of the community college, several ideas were brainstormed, including: A Facebook profile for the clinic, videos uploaded to the college's website, discussion boards, and blogs. However, due to the social media policy of the college several of these ideas would violate the policy. The decision was made to launch a healthcare blog website dedicated for the clinic to reach the students.

## **Literature Review**

Researchers indicate that there are a number of serious health challenges that new college students face when transitioning to a college setting. They suggest that college students are at high risk for substance abuse, mental health issues, sexual promiscuity, stress, and poor diet (El-Gilany et al., 2013; Oswalt et al., 2015)

In addition, Bravender (2014) found that 15% of incoming freshman already had a chronic health condition or disability. This presents a unique challenge for a freshman who is already away from normal support systems and previous sources of health care and health promotion.

When conducting the literature review, many examples were found of college health clinics having positive effects on the health of students (Barry, Whiteman, Piazza-Gardner, & Jensen, 2013; Spierer et al., 2013; Collins et al., 2015; Levy, 2015; Luo et al., 2015; Filipkowski et al., 2016; Valerio et al., 2016; Kritsotakis et al., 2016). These benefits were most pronounced in the areas of sexual health and safety.

The review of the literature also suggested that, while college students perceived the role of student health clinics to be important, they did not have the necessary information about the clinics to understand the full range of services offered. Some suggestions were identified to increase awareness, including having more information about the clinic and clinicians available around campus, being a presence around campus during events, having up-to-date equipment, and responding promptly to requests (Deshwal et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2014).

The public already uses social media to obtain health information; therefore, it behooves medical professionals and agencies to present accurate health information to them. Chun Hai-Fung et al. conducted a meta-analysis in 2016 about social media use during the 2014-2015 Ebola virus outbreak. Findings indicated that there was a large amount of social media use regarding the virus during the extent of the epidemic.

Blogs or blogging has been the most prevalent and established form of social media (Shiau & Luo, 2013; Grajales 3rd, Sheps, Ho, Novak-Lauscher, & Eysenbach, 2014; Quadir & Chen, 2015). Blogging is used by a multitude of individuals who can post to the internet about

any topic and make comments to other blogs (Shiau & Luo, 2013). Blogging provides an effective avenue for sharing information and, when conducted by health professionals, can educate readers about health-promoting behaviors (Lu, 2013; Shiau & Luo, 2013; Grajales III, et al., 2014; Quadri & Chen, 2015; Stavrositu & Kim, 2015).

### **Project Methods**

The primary goal of this project involves the collaboration among the health care providers in this clinic, the clinic administration, the Media Department of the college, and the Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) project team to develop a blog that will be used to increase health awareness for the student body, leading to increased student use of the clinic's resources. The DNP project team will provide the leadership in developing a format for using blogs as a method of social media communication to the college students. The blogs will be created by the healthcare providers in the clinic and then approved by the Media Department following accepted protocols. Major meetings took place between the team leaders, clinic staff, administration, and the media department between February 2017 and May 2017. The subjects of the meetings concerned data collection about the student body, community college social media policies, blog topics interesting and relevant to students, and guidance for the staff on maintaining the blog.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation included the following outcome measures: likes, comments, views of the blog, number of patients seen at the clinic compared to the numbers of patients seen at the clinic in 2016 monthly data, and the survey about the blog by the clinical staff pre-and post-implementation. However, due to lack of historical data we were unable to compare the number of students seen at the clinic before and after the blog implementation. The survey was

qualitative in nature and composed of three pre and post questions to determine how the staff felt about the blog prior to implementation and post implementation. These data were collected by the Media Department and the blog website for the project leaders for analysis.

The pre-survey was composed of the following three questions: What have you heard about blogs, how do you feel about the blog, do you believe this will increase the use of the health clinic? The clinical staff who were chosen to be in charge of the blog, the head of the Media Department, and the clinic's administrator were the ones selected for the pre-and post survey. The clinical staff reported being nervous and unsure about the blog creation, but looked forward to learning. All three individuals felt the blog would help reach out to the student body. The post survey included the following question: How do you feel about the blog? How do you feel about the reception of the blog? What would have made the blog transition easier? The responses were similar and supportive of the blog. They enjoyed writing and posting the blogs and seeing the number of views. While they were surprised at the limited comment responses, they did feel they were reaching the student body, since many of the nursing students rotating through the clinic mentioned the blog. However, they could not be sure if there were increasing students utilizing the clinic because the clinic does not specifically track how many students use the clinic.

The blog is reaching a large audience. As of March 2018 there were 2,968 unique visitors to the blog accounting for 4,024 views. While we believe the blog is reaching our goals locally, it is interesting to know that the blog has also been viewed from a total of 27 countries.

### **Impact on Practice**

This project demonstrates a relatively unexplored option for nurse practitioners and other healthcare providers in a community college health clinic to reach their target audiences. The

power of the internet and social media to track and target groups for health promotion is an underused tool as many practitioners do not feel comfortable utilizing it (Knight et al, 2015). This project represents a strategy that any office, health system, health clinic, or urgent care could use to reach out to patients for health education and health promotion.

### **Conclusions**

There were many lessons learned in the course of this project. The importance of knowing your target audience cannot be understated. The intimate knowledge of this group allows the project leader to develop targeted messaging that will be most beneficial and interesting to the group in question.

The media department or group should be contacted early and in person. This allows for early communication about social media policies and content approval. This information is necessary to plan the project. The media department is also indispensable in providing guidance on content formation for the inexperienced author and reaching the target audience.

An important factor that must be in every project is sustainability. Writing blogs that interest your target population can be difficult after a long period of time. The concern for the main blogger was that the blogs she was writing would not be interesting to the target audience. The community college nursing students who were doing time in the clinic wrote several blogs while there. This provided blogs for the clinic and allowed nursing student to learn more about health education. It also provided them with a vested interest in showing their fellow students their blogs so that they might reach more students.