The Promise & Challenges of Social Media in Public Health & Medicine
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"Measure what is measurable, and make measurable what is not so."
Gallileo Gallilei (1564-1642)

The utilization of social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook & mobile continues to grow rapidly world-wide. Professionals and laypersons have adopted these communication and information platforms. Public Health providers may be both generators and professional consumers of content distributed through social media networks.

The consideration of how social media can be leveraged by providers to improve the Public's Health should incorporate data-driven, evidence-based measures. This is particularly true in environments where resources are scarce and there are competing priorities of known benefit and duty.

There are a number of ways in which social media are currently implemented in Public Health. These frameworks can impact the data compiled & analyses conducted. Social media examples posted by Public Health professionals to social media platforms include:

* Txt4Baby is the largest mobile health system in the United States with more than 101 thousand participants, according to HHS's CTO Todd Park

* In study of fifteen facebook diabetes communities 66% of posts were personal experiences and 27% were promotions for treatments according to Lisa Gualtieri

* As of Oct. 19, 871 hospitals have 2,259 social media sites, according to Ed Bennett's Hospital Social Network List

* Social media can be a resource for education and engagement via Jan Gurley, MD in Doc Gurley's "Recette de La Vie" docgurley.com

There is a rich literature, ongoing research, policies and practice regarding the importance of social factors and health. Research incorporating the specific impacts of contemporary social media technologies per se is at a relatively early stage.

This gap presents an important limitation to understanding spatial-temporal factors in Public Health. The breadth and strength of social factors research linked to policies, standards and outcomes offer key resources moving forward.

There are a number of ways in which social media are implemented in Public Health. These frameworks can impact the data compiled & inform the analyses conducted.

There are many interesting and important questions to consider regarding spatial-temporal factors of social media and public health. These include:

> * Which robust public health assessment methods and tools can be implemented to conduct spatial-temporal analyses of social media data?

> * How can existing epidemiologic and statistical methods be extended to program and policy evaluation and outcome measures?

> * What are the metrics of success and failure?

> * Given similar issues and circumstances, what makes a particular social media instance more efficacious?

> * What best practices can be identified to engage the broadest number of stakeholders in leveraging these dynamic resources?

> * Which of these hold the greatest likelihood of being incorporated into existing workflows?

> * What are the human subjects issues and ethical conduct responsibilities of this research and adoption of these technologies?

Social media are as old as human speech, with air being the medium through which sound waves propagate observes Mayo Clinic social media leader, Lee Aase. These dynamic tools and the spatial-temporal analysis challenges they pose are contemporary opportunities to improve the Public's health.

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