

Medical center CEO uses social media to be more transparent

By Daniel Casciato

Many CEOs have been using social media platforms like blogging or Twitter to promote new services, answer questions about their products, and to get more personal with their customers, associates, the public and even the media.

Paul Levy, president and CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, takes it one step further and uses it in an effort to demonstrate transparency and the power of discussion and community to solve problems.

Levy — who has been blogging for three years and tweeting for one — once posted the percentage of Beth Israel Deaconess patients who get central line infections and the steps the hospital was taking to eliminate hospital acquired



Submitted photo

Paul Levy, CEO, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

infections. Few hospitals publicize this kind of information, but for Levy, it is a patient's right to know.

By leveraging social media tools, Levy also is developing relationships with the general public. He believes that part of the job of a health care CEO is to represent what's happening at the hospital and to keep the public apprised of issues that are important to them.

His blog, "Running a Hospital," gives readers an inside look at the issues facing one of the nation's leading academic medical centers. He often shares stories of his employees and the patients. Levy's goal for blogging is simple: to find interesting topics to write about and to make it interesting enough for people to read.

"I started this blog because I believe I have a fascinating job and I thought that people might enjoy reading about it," he says. "I write about what interests me at the moment. I tend to pick out one or two topics a day and write about it. Sometimes it may be something local, some days it's something national, and sometimes it's not related to health care at all. It always varies."

Levy, not his PR staff, authors his own posts. Also, he notes, his posts and tweets are not reviewed by an internal committee. The first time anyone at the hospital reads his blog postings or tweets are when they are published.

"This is my own personal account," he says. "The hospital has its own social media outlets. No one ever reviews what

I write. I just write it."

He also maintains his own personal Facebook page. His advice to health care administrators about using social media is to make sure you write on a regular basis and to write it yourself so it's in

the gateway drug that leads to the crack that is Twitter," he says with a laugh.

In the next few years, Levy says that social media is going to grow in importance in ways that we don't understand yet.

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— Paul Levy, president and CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

your own voice.

"You don't want to start a blog if you're not going to write it yourself," he says. "It should be highly personal. Unless, it's in your voice, it won't be interesting to your readers. So that represents a personal and time commitment to do that. If I was just starting up, I would start a Twitter account and start following interesting people and posting interesting things and learning what people are doing that way."

Levy tweets or writes a post to his blog nearly every day from his home, usually before his regular 5 a.m. bike ride. He spends about 15 to 20 minutes writing. Levy has approximately 2,704 Twitter followers and he follows 162 people. Since he started tweeting in early December 2008, he's written more than 1,300 tweets, or nearly four tweets per day.

"Someone once said that Facebook is

"The cat is out of the bag, so to speak, and people will invent more ways to use it," he says. "That's just the nature of it. One of the things to watch that is coming up quickly is Google Wave and the power of that and doing collaborative planning on the Web."

He adds that the only pitfall that should be avoided with social media is to remember that everything you put out there will be public.

"There's no magic to this. People should try it and enjoy the fun of it," he says. "Try it out and play around with it and see what makes you comfortable and what makes you uncomfortable. Do the things that make you comfortable and avoid the things that make you uncomfortable." 🩺

Read Levy's blog at <http://runninga-hospital.blogspot.com/> or follow his tweets at <http://twitter.com/PaulFlevy>.


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