

Social Networks and Health Information in Times of Pandemic

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Commentary

Since the emergence of social networks, these have been used to keep distance communication between people, share news, feelings, among many other purposes. In its evolution, modalities have been integrated that are increasingly perfecting this form of social communication, giving messages greater promptness and new audiovisual forms.

Science, also in constant development, makes use of this possibility and these networks are a way of publicizing and exchanging criteria and points of view among the scientific population to analyze phenomena, carry out public health campaigns, access patients or carry out therapeutic interventions. At various times, the effectiveness of the use of these networks in medical sciences has been demonstrated.

The pandemic that is sweeping the world caused by COVID-19, led to re-contextualize dissimilar processes of daily life, telework, distance education, video consultations, among many other forms, have come to perpetuate themselves over time. People subjected to long periods of confinement, as the most effective way to avoid contagion, saw in the use of social networks, a way to maintain that contact with friends, colleagues and family in a virtual way, keeping social distancing without losing the social relationship.

The forms of interaction, as well as the exchange or consumption of information, have changed radically in recent years. Today we live in a hyper connected society, in which the existing communication channels between people have changed very clearly, due to the widespread use of the Internet and the use of social networks.

These same forms are used to search for information related to medical care; it is pertinent to point out that it is not always reliable.

Currently, a large number of people search the Internet before requesting a consultation, share their experiences and follow those of others, even influencing the choice of treatment, hospital or health professional. The presence of health institutions is increasing in social networks, with the aim of improving the quality of life of the population, providing updated information.

There are health promotion campaigns, specialized sites on a certain topic and support for patients with a specific disease, but it cannot be forgotten that all this information should always be consulted with a qualified medical staff, which allows verifying the veracity of the information, that can be found. A digital sociability is currently achieved in the area of a health condition shared by people from very different environments gathered by the network and not in classic physical places such as hospitals, health centers, and medical consultations, among others [1].

The function of the health authorities to inform in the midst of the pandemic requires the correct use of social networks to avoid a social media crisis. While health professionals have great knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, they face difficulties that prevent the effective communication of this information that is so vital to society [2].

Through networks, mass communication is achieved, with a community and interpersonal profile. This plays an important role in the dissemination of knowledge,

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modification or reinforcement of behaviors, values, social norms and in the stimulation of change processes that contribute to the improvement of the quality of life. This form of interaction must be in the process of transformation and reorganization of services to intensify their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and quality.

The current pandemic has brought an enormous advantage to the use of online platforms. Tools have been introduced that allow assessments to be made through photos, videos and questionnaires to patients, replacing face-to-face appointments, this being an advantage for doctors and patients, since they avoid the latter's travel to health centers, thus maintaining biosecurity measures.

Certainly, the pandemic has led to greater consumption of social networks. Forms have been put at the service of the population that allow them to know the results of tests carried out by themselves or by relatives, the possibility of online purchases, entertainment, news updates, among others. The information issued by the media is capable of directing the interest and behavior of the population, so it is necessary to disseminate truthful information that encourages compliance with health measures [3].

Although the use of social networks offers dissimilar benefits, it is no less true that it is necessary to be careful when using them. Excessive use of this form of communication can devirtualize the quality of human relationships, as physical-real contact is replaced by the virtual relationship that involves relating through a screen; which can cause deterioration of family relationships, lack of communication between household members and therefore, the lack of knowledge of fathers and mothers of the effects on the health of their children. Another important aspect is the possibility that any member of the family nucleus has to access and be part of communities that can

lead to eating disorders, violent events, among other negative manifestations [4].

Social networks are ideal for communicating medical information effectively, especially during health crises like the current one, with endless possibilities to work on the well-being of the population by raising their health status. It has the advantage of being able to reach a greater number of people in less time and with the possibility of broadcasting this information in different languages at the same time. Despite all these advantages, it is pertinent to point out that the direct doctor-patient exchange will never lose its leading role.

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