

## Use of Email and Facebook for Patient-Doctor Communication



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Despite recommendations from some hospitals and professional organisations to limit email contact with patients and avoid friending them on the social media, research suggests that many patients continue to use online communication tools including email and Facebook to engage with their physicians. The study is published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

The research was conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and suggests that there exists a disconnect between what patients expect and what physicians are willing to do when communicating online.

An online survey was used to collect data from 2252 CVS retail pharmacy customers between May and June 2013. Patients were asked to provide feedback with respect to their online usage and the communication tools they use for filling prescriptions, tracking their health progress and accessing their health information.

The findings show that 37 percent of patients used personal email to contact their doctors or hospital within the past six months and 18 percent reported that they used Facebook for the same purpose. The researchers estimate that the percentage of patients using Facebook to contact their doctors is expected to grow as the average age of Facebook increases and familiarity with the social media platform grows. Previous studies also show that patients are interested in using Facebook to contact their healthcare providers.

The findings also show that patients between the ages of 25 and 44 are most likely to use email or Facebook to contact their healthcare providers. Approximately 49 percent of those surveyed in this age group indicated using Facebook to contact their doctors within the last six months as compared to 34 percent in the 45-64 age group and 26 percent in the 65 or older group. 46 percent of the respondent indicated a desire to use email for filling prescriptions while 7 percent claimed that they were already doing so.

While the use of social media and email continues to grow, the American College of Physicians and the Federation of State Medical Boards advises that physicians should limit how they communicate with patients via email and work towards keeping their communication with patients professional.

Source: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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