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## Using Social Media to Engage Hospital Consumers



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Social media can engage hospital decision makers, those involved in service design and quality improvement, and consumers (patients, family members, and carers), but is underutilised by Australian hospitals. Therefore, researchers from the Centre for Health Communication and Participation at La Trobe University (Melbourne, Australia), and an advisory committee consisting of consumers and service providers developed a guide for using social media as a consumer engagement tool.

Two research studies were used to inform the guide. One was a scoping literature review of social media use as a tool for engaging stakeholders in the design or improvement of health organisations. The other was an interview study of 26 Australian public hospital stakeholders to learn their opinions and experiences regarding the social media use for engagement.

This guide made the following recommendations for effective social media-based engagement.

### Social Media Preparation

1. Supportive executive and good social media governance are needed. To establish readiness, organisations should have:
  - Clear, easy-to-access social media engagement organisational systems and structures that are codesigned with consumers
  - Social media-based engagement activities with adequately resources
  - A culture supporting innovation in consumer engagement, quality improvement, and communications
  - Opportunities for service providers and consumers to develop skills in social media consumer engagement.
  - Evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of social media-based consumer engagement activities.
2. Build the organisation's social media presence. Organisations should:
  - Understand platforms features which can impact engagement and target audiences
  - Promote organisational social media pages to consumers and the wider community
  - Develop high quality and engaging content
  - Have processes for managing social media patient/ consumer feedback
3. Make safe social media spaces. Organisations should:
  - Accessible social media governance documents and community standards
  - Monitor and moderate social media pages and groups
  - Partner with target audiences for moderation
  - Manage negative comments and discussion of polarising topics
  - Respect user privacy

### Using social media engagement as a space for collaboration.

There are many advantages. It can facilitate collaboration with consumer representatives from target audiences and can be combined with other engagement methods. It can aid in training and support of consumers and engagement service providers. It can provide transparency so that consumers and providers understand how their contributions affect QI and service design activities.

1. Social Media can inform service design.

- Data collection methods include:
  - Key word searches to find relevant online conversations
  - Collating messages sent directly to the organisation
  - Hosting consultation activities on social media channel
- Data can originate from public social media or private channels.

2. Social media can facilitate co-design and collaborative engagement approaches Through virtual rooms with restricted access (register to join).

### **Inform Consumers**

Many people give feedback to hospitals through social media. By using social media to engage with the hospital might make it easier to participate in consumer engagement activities, build a relationship with hospital staff, and connect to others interested in making changes. It is important to understand the risks of engaging through social media. These include negative interactions with other people online and self-identifying of health conditions or use of specific services.

**Source:** [La Trobe. Report](#)

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