



How Adequate Social Media Management Supports the Viral Hepatitis Elimination Program

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1. Importance of Viral Hepatitis Elimination

Viral hepatitis is one of the deadliest diseases in human history. The mortality rate of viral hepatitis is majorly linked to the hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections, with an estimated number of 1.3 million deaths per year (1). Globally, there are almost half a billion people (1 out of 12 persons) living with chronic viral hepatitis, of which up to 40% will develop liver cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), or liver failure (2-4). Surprisingly, 40% to 80% of chronic carriers are not aware of their infection status (5).

After several decades of viral discovery, improvements in diagnostic tests, different lines of antiviral therapies, and vaccine trials, it is now time for eliminating viral hepatitis. Through an adopted program in 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) intends to globally eliminate viral hepatitis by 2030 (6). Fostering the knowledge of the world population about hepatitis and a cohesive collaboration between public health experts are the keystones for success of this ambitious program (7).

2. Using Social Media to Spread Information

In parallel with the dramatic increase of the internet penetration rate (IPR), the use of social media has become a notable part of everyday life for many individuals. Social media platforms are dynamic internet based websites and applications on which users can create, modify and share content, as well as debate with other users all over the world (8). This offers an exclusive opportunity

to engage a large audience of both professionals and consumers (9). Social media has been the ideal communication tool for users in the public health sectors to search, find, and broadcast information about disease-prevention, treatments, and other science - based knowledge (10). It has been shown that more than 75% of adults use different social media to gather knowledge and consult about their health (11). Recently, public health institutions are frequently using social media to propagate educational resources to inform the public. For instance, social media has efficiently been applied for reporting about epidemics, recalling blood donors to donate blood or plasma, promoting vaccination events, and other health - related campaigns (12,13).

Undoubtedly, social media could play a key role in accomplishing the hepatitis elimination program. However, inadequate preliminary knowledge of how to use these platforms for public health purposes could lead to insufficient achievements. In this editorial, we try to inform people involved in the elimination of hepatitis to choose the most suitable social media platform in their area and manage their related activities.

Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber etc. are some well - known examples of social media. Each of these platforms has its own advantages and disadvantages of which users in public health sectors should be aware of. For example, although Twitter has a limit of 280 characters, it is more straightforward and easy to monitor. This asset makes it more communicative - focused. By using the hash-tags before keywords (e.g. #Nohep, #hepatitis, #hepatitisC and #globalhealth), your keyword will act as a link and can maximize the visibility of your post.

In contrast to Twitter, Facebook does not have a character restriction and users can post videos and make several albums of photos and images. Although, we cannot ignore the potential of Facebook marketing, this platform is much more adapted to private interactions among limited numbers of friends and family. Specific pages concerning hepatitis, such as Nohep, Hepatitis Monthly Journal, World Hepatitis Alliance, etc. can be found on Facebook.

Other types of social media are the instant message services like WhatsApp and Telegram. Both apps can share text and videos, however, Telegram is able to process long video messages while WhatsApp has a lower capacity. This makes Telegram more popular for sharing seminars, webinars, and other meetings. Moreover, WhatsApp allows groups up to 256 users while Telegram supports groups up to 3000 members.

Although there are more applications with different features, managers of social media in public health sectors should know about restrictions for both audience as well as users in different countries. For instance, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are filtered in some countries. Furthermore, awareness about policies, copyright, and ethical rules of the desired application is necessary in advance.

3. Social and Hepatitis Elimination

Several organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have provided a tool “[Social-MediaWorks](#)” to explain how to establish your own social media strategy in the medical field. An assessment of your target audience, goals, and objective(s) are the first crucial steps in tailoring your message.

Regardless of the chosen platform, it is recommended to systematically update your profile picture and cover photo with creative ideas and include logos of organizations that are involved in the program of eliminating viral hepatitis. Furthermore, in order to keep the audience updated on a regular basis, you can prepare a list of messages or posts and design a timetable for releasing in advance. However, the question remains how to make an effective and attractive post?

Keeping your posts or tweets short is important in designing an attractive post. This makes the content easy to read and more efficient. It has been shown that shorter posts could be distributed 60% more than longer ones (9). It is strongly advised to combine your messages with a video, picture, graph, figure, or statistic. The extra material converts your text to a more attractive message, boost the amount of “likes” on your Facebook post (50% more likes compared to posts without a photo (14)) and increases the number of retweets (by 62% on average (15)). It has been

indicated that starting posts or messages by asking questions and replying with relevant answers makes it stand out and increases the attention to more than 70% (9,14).

In addition, it is necessary to update your posts with the most recent information. Moreover, be responsive when posts and tweets are shared, forwarded or retweeted. Keep retweeting and replying to questions and related comments promptly. Depending on your audience, it is worthy to post greetings or congratulations with your organization’s logo during special national or international events like New Year.

To reach a wider audience, try to like, comment, forward, and retweet the content and motto of other organizations involved in the field of viral hepatitis elimination like WHO, CDC, EASL, Nohep etc.

In order to manage your performance in social media, self - evaluation is essential. Accordingly, different platforms of social media offer analytical tools, in which you can assess the level of public interest in your posts over time. The analytics.twitter.com/about for Twitter and Facebook Insights allows managers to evaluate their own activities and of their followers.

4. Contents of Your Posts

Always bear in mind that the task of your posts is to assist the elimination of hepatitis globally. Therefore, regardless of which platform is used, your audience mainly consists of ordinary people who require basic awareness about hepatitis and liver cancer. Your duty is highlighted when you know that approximately 50% of HCV carriers and 75% of HBV carriers are not aware of their infection (9). Knowing this should stimulate you to promote the public’s knowledge about viral hepatitis.

At first, it is important to highlight the burden of disease and emphasize the role of viral hepatitis in developing liver cancer (16). Providing the most recent numbers of hepatitis B, C, and D infection, and increasing liver cancer deaths globally or locally as well as referring to the percentage of viral hepatitis, as the major cause of liver cancer, is useful in spreading your message. In this case, drawing attention to the annual reports by WHO, CDC, NIH, or local hepatitis networks is recommended.

You can refer to the efficient treatment for hepatitis C and prophylactic vaccine against hepatitis B infections as two available measures in reducing the risk of liver cancer. In addition, describing the route of transmission of viral hepatitis and, subsequently, addressing the groups at high risk of infection, like hetero and homosexual individuals, injecting drug users, babies born to mothers who are HBV carriers and health care providers, are some informative examples for the audience (17-20).

You may emphasize on the prevalence of hepatitis B and C infection together with their diagnostic and preventive methods in layman terms (21). Subsequently, you can refer to campaigns of screening and vaccination in the past or near future. In addition to developing your own posts, sharing webinars and links of training programs (National Hepatitis Training Institute or Know More Hepatitis) increases the public awareness about risk factors of viral hepatitis.

5. Conclusion

Social media, by sharing content and increasing individual interactions, have changed the traditional ways of human communication and education. Through the abovementioned statements, we tried to list a few fundamental tips in using these applications for spreading “the elimination of viral hepatitis program”. Efficient management of these apps will be a powerful leverage towards a successful implementation of this ambitious program.

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