Hospitals, US News and Physician Referrals

Your Secret Weapon is...

Twitter is a waste of time, the domain of internet trolls, and a social media free-for-all without filters or common courtesies. All true. But it is also a wellspring of great ideas, fulfilling conversations, collegial goodwill and, most importantly, a highly effective channel to increase physician referrals and elevate the US News ranking of your hospital, department, or division.

Here’s why. Elevating your US News ranking is best done by elevating your US News ‘Reputation’ score (recently rebranded as ‘Expert Opinion’). Because this score stems entirely from a nationwide survey of physicians, the winning strategy is to earn their survey votes by introducing them to the depth, breadth and overall expertise of your physicians. This simple game of awareness is your single best path to rise in the US News rankings. Twitter is a critically important way to play that game.

The Secret Weapon

Twitter is an inexpensive and largely untapped channel to create and nurture those influential physician connections. Frequently credited at the preferred social media for conveying health information, physicians, scientists, and researchers tend to gravitate to Twitter because it’s efficient, effective and rewards well-articulated arguments and discussions. (At least it can, and typically does, amongst the threads, hashtags, and groups that doctors routinely inhabit.)

With any luck dozens, and perhaps many more, of your staff physicians are active on Twitter, regularly sharing new journal articles, student kudos, interesting x-rays, or instructive surgery videos. Some may have a hundred followers, others thousands, with combined reach an order of magnitude greater than that of your institutional following.

But here’s the secret. The Twitter followers of doctors are... other doctors, typically in the same specialty. For a physician with a thousand Twitter followers, fully a third (or more) are likely to be fellow doctors. Which means that, through their thoughtful and experienced comments, your physicians are regularly educating and reminding lots of physicians (who vote with US News voting and who refer patients) of the expertise and accomplishment of themselves, their colleagues and their institution.

Making Your Job Easier

As the marketing and communications experts of the institution or department, your fundamental challenge is to collect positive stories and spread them -- easily and cost-effectively.

Expertscape and Twitter together are a potent combination to do just that. Expertscape supplies a steady stream of "mini-press releases," in the form of tweets, celebrating the outstanding academic accomplishments of your experts -- all of them, throughout the year. Twitter, amplified by your institutional followers and especially the followers of your Twitter-enabled physicians, is a megaphone to spread this good news.

Twitter Rules of Engagement

To optimize Twitter as a physician outreach channel, consider the following tactics:

1. **Know who your Twitter-engaged clinicians are** - First, figure out which faculty members are active on Twitter (and other social media channels.) Keep a list, and keep track of their posts, handles, threads and number of followers.
2. Then support them – This means following them, retweeting their posts and sharing them on other channels. And regularly encourage your institutional followers to follow them.

3. Don’t ‘like’ when you can retweet – Twitter rewards engagement, so retweeting has a greater impact. Likes don’t end up in your feed whereas retweets do. For example, the initial tweet at right reach >30x the initial audience through retweets alone.

4. Give your doctors content to share. And make sure they see it - Expertscape’s ‘mini-press release’ tweets about the academic accomplishments of your expert faculty are a prime example. Encouraging your physicians to retweet and otherwise share these announcements keeps them and the institution front of mind...which is fundamental to increasing referrals and encouraging US News votes.

5. Comment – Sharing is good, but tweets offer an opportunity to add interest and impact. Comment and compliment. Include @mentions(at left) to engage. Use links to direct readers to pertinent content. And don’t forget hashtags. (The Healthcare Hashtag Project can help you make the most of your reach and significance.)

6. Improve your doctors’ tweets - Tweets are no longer just 280 clever characters. Help your doctors enliven their tweets by providing links, landing pages, graphics and other resources that make it easy for busy physicians to shine in the twitterverse. Again, make sure they see this.

7. Educate - Let your physicians know your team is there to support them. Recognize that some will be fully engaged, while others will be mystified by your very presence. Respond accordingly.

8. Be consistent and play the long game - Twitter is a long-term investment. Make it a regular, reliable drumbeat part of your marketing arsenal. Done right, dollar for limited marketing dollar, it’s the best deal going.

Getting Started
Chances are that you already have a respectable contingent of actively ‘Twittering’ physicians already. In the words of Emeril Lagasse, all you need to do is ‘Kick it up a notch!’ The eight rules listed above will do that, and Expertscape can help. We can run a quick overlap analysis on your faculty and tell you who your world-class experts are. (There will be some pleasant surprises.) It’s a great, easy addition to everything you’re already doing.

Contact mail@expertscape.com to learn more.