

referred for gastric bypass surgery, competing in a doughnut-eating contest? Would it be appropriate to bring that up at an office visit?"

From the patient's perspective, however, it is easy to understand the temptation to reach out to physicians via social media, says Chretien. "There may be a feeling for some that we have lost the relationship that physicians had with patients in the past, when we knew them well and spent more time with them. Perhaps this is one way they could communicate more and build more trust. It could help them see the human side of their physicians."

Social media can also be an effective tool for physicians to generate and disseminate their own medical information, says Dr. Kevin Pho, who practises internal medicine in Nashua, New Hampshire, and serves as "social media's leading physician voice" on his popular website (kevinmd.com). "Physicians can guide patients to reputable sources or

become reputable sources themselves. A doctor can get on a blog and write an editorial. Providing that type of education is one of the biggest advantages that social media brings to medicine."

But what about blogs written by patients? Should doctors be compelled to read them? It might prove useful in certain cases — a psychiatrist could learn of a patient's intention to commit suicide or harm others, for example. On the other hand, expecting busy physicians to wade through the online writings of all their patients may be unreasonable.

"It's a real dilemma. In some cases, it might seem irresponsible not to follow the blog. In other cases, it would be just logistically impossible," says Dr. David Brendel, a psychiatrist practising in the area of Boston, Massachusetts, and a sought-after educator on matters of medical ethics and professionalism (drdavidbrendel.com). "The more patients who have blogs or are using Twitter and putting information

about themselves into the public sphere, the question is: What is appropriate and necessary for physicians to know?" — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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Part I: **The "good doctor" discussion** (www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.109-4200).

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