The Question:
In the last twenty years, there have been profound changes in how information is communicated. The internet and social networking have enabled everything from romance to revolution. In the healing arts, this change has transformed how the public accesses and uses health-related information. What used to rest solely in the hands of medical professionals now is easily accessible in the public domain. This paradigm shift brings with it benefits and challenges. As future members of the medical profession and current users of these communications vehicles, you are uniquely poised to apply and evaluate the impact of these evolving methods of information exchange on the art and science of medicine.

We are asking you:
In the last twenty years, the internet and social networking have brought profound changes in how information is communicated. How can we harness this technology to improve health?

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iMedicine: creating the Facebook concept into Medicine.

Two hundred years ago a visionary idea of a periodically delivered medical journal changed how new discoveries in Medicine were communicated in our medical society. At that time, this new communication led to an extraordinary transformation that impacted not only medical professionals but also the health of patients as well. As technology has evolved, internet and social networking are now giving us the opportunity to access information faster and communicate more efficiently with our medical colleagues and patients. This new technological achievements are redefining healthcare and patient-doctor interactions.

With more than 800 millions users, Facebook is the largest social network in the world. The success of this company relies on a simple, private way to access information about our friends and family. This network unifies our society in a webpage. If we extrapolate this concept into Medicine, we will be able to create a new approach into healthcare. Imagine a medical social network where we can unify our medical society and communicate with other physicians, nurses and hospital staff regarding patients. This could be used in small groups like hospitals and clinics or in bigger settings like members of a medical association.

As on Facebook, we could access this network from our smart phones or handheld devices and receive live notifications about our patients. For example, if a patient is having a seizure, the nurse could notify the physician immediately while sending a video of the event with current vital signs and electroencephalogram activity. The event and the nurse-physician communication would be automatically posted on a virtual wall and would remain in this patient’s medical history that could be accessed anytime.
We can also have active communication between different hospital teams. The critical care team notifies nursing and multidisciplinary care teams that therapeutic hypothermia was initiated; reciprocally nursing can post live vital signs during this treatment. By implementing this into electronic medical records, we could reduce errors and simplify communication between physicians and care providers. In the clinic, health care management could be more personal and interactive. Patients could access this network to record and track their weight, blood pressure, heart rate, glycemias or even more and share these results with their provider.

By use of this network, we could also access and document photos or video calls between physicians and patients. This will provide instant evaluation and treatment to patients. For example, patients could send photos about their rashes or videos about their seizure events. Video calls could provide medical service remotely to patients that live in isolated communities and reach places that we could never imagine more efficiently and effectively.

As New England Journal of Medicine innovated in 1812, we should take advantage of the internet and social networking to achieve a better communication in our medical society. The tools are already available and waiting to be used. It is in our hands and our decisions what we should create with them.
Picture – This picture illustrates the use of smart phones for live notifications between physicians and nurses.