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HOSPITALS PICK UP SPEED IN NEW WORLD OF TWITTER, FACEBOOK
Boston, MA, April 13, 2010 – Despite their conservative approach to new systems and procedures, more and more hospitals are discovering how social media can engage them with both public and patients. According to a just released white paper, hospital communications directors are using Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to communicate in a crisis, share some good news, or just plain connect.

“Social media like Twitter are exciting new tools in the communications workbox,” said Jane Sherwin, owner of WordDrive Communications and author of a new white paper, *Social Media for Hospitals and Health Care Organizations*. “With social media, hospitals can extend their voice way beyond what’s possible in traditional media. They gain the ability to converse directly with individual supporters (and complainers). They can convey their mission, and a sense of what it’s like to be a patient, in ways not possible in the usual ads and hospital newsletters.”

According to one source, 600 hospitals in the United States (about 10 percent of all US hospitals), were reporting use of some form of social media. This represents a nearly 11% increase in hospitals reporting from November 2009.

While some hospitals are large enough to have a separate web team that can easily take on new social media tools, others worry about already stressed budgets and staff. Sherwin says, “It’s true that there is a learning curve for social media, but it’s a very short one. And the larger the hospital, the more time needed to keep Facebook pages (and Tweets) up to date.

“But once a Twitter profile is in place, or a Facebook page, you can choose how often you release new material. With a couple of hours a

week, a small clinic or home health association should be able to strengthen their reach into the community and attract visitors and, eventually, clients.”

Health care organizations may also worry about negative comments on their Facebook page. “Administrators worry about losing control of what is said about the hospital or clinic,” says Sherwin, “but it’s going to be said anyway. With social media like Facebook, you have a chance to spot the complaint quickly, and respond to it before it gets spread in online and print media.”

Sherwin cautions about using social media as advertising. “They are not designed to sell products, but to connect and inform the wider community. One children’s hospital recently created a colorful video of staff, patients, and the CEO hula-hooping away. The hula-hoops are part of the hospital’s wellness program, but the real message was about a hospital where they understand the value of joy in doing the tough work of healing.”

The complete copy of Sherwin’s free white paper, *Social Media for Hospitals and Health Care Organizations*, is available when you sign up for her e-newsletter at <http://worddrivecommunications.com/>. You can also e-mail her at Jane@WordDriveCommunications.com or call her at (617) 489-1834.