Letter to Editor

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Social media and health policy

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Dear Editor in Chief

Policy- and decision-making is of extreme importance in the health-care sector, and, in this regard, policy- and decision-makers try to take into account all aspects of health policy and use all the levers necessary for its effective implementation (1). In the health policy process, individuals, groups and organizations can have an impact, in that they are trying to influence health policies by fulfilling their demands (2).

Social media can play an important role too in improving and increasing awareness among health policy- and decision-makers and people, and, therefore, they can have an influence as one of the most important actors in the health policy process (3). Social media may contribute giving support, for example, to preventive interventions such as campaigns and initiatives aimed at reducing the number of accidents, curbing alcohol consumption, and mitigating the burden of smoking-related disorders (4). Unfortunately, despite their effective role, social media are rarely taken into consideration, and, as such, implementation of various health-care sector policies can be plagued by many issues (5).

Social media can set the agenda and play an important role in choosing the right interventions for suitable implementation of that policy. Social media can also provide an appropriate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of a given policy plan (6). Of course, social media are not always in favor of implementing a given health policy and, sometimes, can act as a serious opponent. Public opinion is influenced by social media for accepting or not adopting a given policy, and, as such, social media can play a constructive or negative role through the various communication channels (7).

Public opinion can be influenced by social media, which, in their turns, can affect health policy- and decision-makers and decide towards a policy of hesitation or stability (4).

Health policy and decision-makers should try to be able to interact with social media before implementing a policy. Of course, the purpose of this interaction is not to align the social media to the unconditional implementation of a policy. The goal is to better explain the challenges and problems created by implementing a policy to better inform public opinion and increase its awareness (8).

On the other hand, social media create new dimensions of health-care services. Policy- and decision-makers, service providers and patients need to communicate properly, and with the formation of new communication channels, better outcomes in the implementation of health-care policies are anticipated to arise (9).

Social media, characterized by features such as variety, speed and sharing, have a prominent place among people in the nowadays society. In recent decades, social media have been able to change the thoughts and behaviors of people on various topics. Many health professionals are aware of this and are trying to exploit social media to divulge health promotion programs and interventions (4, 9).

Unfortunately, some healthcare providers do not have a proper relationship with social media. Failure to support social media from health-care policy- and decision-makers can have adverse health outcomes (10).

Undoubtedly, social media play an important role in health-care policy and their impact cannot be ignored. In all countries of the world, governments try to exploit them in various aspects of the health policy process. A proper, effective utilization of social media can better legitimate a health policy plan and provide policy- and decision-makers with help and support for implementing policies.

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