



Breaking Bad News via Social Media:

an exploratory study of the implications of the use of social networking sites during a sudden, unexpected hospital admission

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Introduction

This research aims to gain an understanding of the complex outcomes of social media use during a crisis by exploring how it is positively and negatively impacting patients and families during the hospital admission.

Social Networking sites are complex, evolving and often misunderstood. When used by people experiencing emotional distress, there is the potential for unintentional consequences that can lead to further stress & conflict.

Objectives and Method

This study attempts to answer two questions:

1. How is the use of social networking sites aiding patients and their support networks during a hospital admission, *and*
2. What negative consequences are arising from the use of these communication tools?

This study included 36 written surveys of a sample of trauma hospital social workers from around Australia.

Trauma hospital social workers were chosen in this study due to the holistic understanding they gain in order to support patients and families during their hospital journey.



Art Work: Al Margen

Results

Social Networking Sites are a valuable for:

- Providing updates and reducing the stress of retelling
- Controlling information, reducing inaccurate communication
- Sourcing emotional, financial and practical support
- For advocacy and campaigning

HOWEVER, negative consequences can include:

- Privacy violations and consent issues
- Confidentiality breaches
- Inaccurate information being provided
- Trolling/trial by internet
- Information going to the wrong people
- Polarising views of social media use
- Conflict between people due to the use of SNS



Conclusion

Social Media has been likened to a double edged sword. It is still a relatively new and evolving form of communication, and ongoing research is required in order to promote its benefits and to and warn of potential perils in regards to its use during a traumatic event.



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