
Zoom On: Marie Ennis-O'Connor, Founder of Health Care Social Media & e-Patient Writer and Speaker

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Marie Ennis-O' Connor is a social media consultant in the field of healthcare, advising the sector through www.hcsmmonitor.com. She co-founded Europe's first breast cancer social media chat and is a founding member of Health2.0 Dublin, part of the Health2.0 international movement. She is also a writer and speaker on the rise of the e-Patient – the development in which patients, empowered by access to electronic information participate more fully in their medical care.

What are your key areas of interest and research?

I work as a communications consultant at the intersection of health care, digital health and social media, with a particular interest in the ways in which healthcare organisations and allied professionals can work in partnership with patients to transform healthcare.

What are the major challenges in your field?

We are witnessing a radical shift in the way we communicate; the healthcare conversation is no longer a one-way narrative but is evolving into a global, participatory discussion facilitated by social media. This is an exciting opportunity, but many healthcare organisations remain wary due to concerns about privacy, compliance and risk to reputation. While not minimising these concerns, it's important to be aware of the danger faced if we don't embrace this opportunity. We risk leaving the field wide open to those who provide less credible and even downright dangerous health information on the internet. A study compiled by Demi & Cooper Advertising and DC Interactive Group shows that more than 90% of people aged 18-24 said they would trust health information they found on social media channels. The challenge for healthcare organisations is to be ready and willing to provide relevant, credible and up-to-date information for health consumers seeking information online.

What is your top management tip?

Never leave your online reputation to chance. Be proactive in framing your online story; otherwise someone else may do it for you.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

Delivering an Ignite speech at the Stanford Medicine X conference in Palo Alto, California last year.

If you had not chosen this career path what do you think you would have become?

Actually this career chose me; I didn't knowingly set out on this path, but a personal health challenge sparked my interest in the potential of social media to transform healthcare. That spark grew into a flame when I saw a way to combine my previous career expertise with a new-found passion for the work I do now.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

I love to travel to new places and my speaking engagements mean I am lucky to get to travel around the world.

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Your favourite quote?

"We do not have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is – how well we do it." Tony Robbins of Tech.

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