



# Ask An Expert

## Transforming Organizations – can social media play to your advantage?

*Next in a series on the Impact of Healthcare Reform on Supply Chain Management*

**Christopher J. O'Connor, Executive Vice President, GNYHA Ventures, Inc.,  
President, GNYHA Services, Inc. and President, Nexera, Inc.**

Over the past few months I have written about supply chain transformation – everything from changing the role of the supply chain executive to the impact of the medical device tax, from comparative effectiveness to transparency. We have talked about the healthcare workforce evolving to meet the demands of healthcare reform, but what about the organization itself? We expect our internal systems to change - reimbursement and coding, focus on clinical effectiveness and outcomes, and instituting measurements of quality – but what about changes that impact organizations at the base: employees, patients, and the communities they serve? And what about communications, whether from staff to staff, patient to physician, or C-suite to the community?

Last month I wrote about healthcare “apps” and the launch of the new GNYHA Ventures company Happtique. Happtique is the first healthcare mobile app store with customizable “cabinets,” or sub-stores, where healthcare enterprises can create their own secure site for distributing healthcare apps. While E-diagnosis is not yet being employed systematically, many doctors and patients are discovering its potential. The role that mobile apps play in improving patient care is expanding. But, so is the broader need for physicians and organizations to embrace platforms available through social media – the ability to have a dialogue and exchange ideas. With healthcare transforming, isn't it time to jump in and learn more about how the social media environment can enhance efficiencies, improve quality, and save dollars?

The proof is in the numbers. Earlier this year a Pew Center study found that 61% of American adults go online and use some sort of social media to search for health information. The Pew study also found that E-patients go on to read commentaries or experiences about health or medical issues through online newsgroups, websites or blogs, and also review online information specific to hospitals and medical facilities. So it seems nothing but sensible to me (with an understanding of the inherent risks, of course) to leverage social media channels in order to achieve valuable community participation. E-patients can provide feedback about improving hospital websites and can be active participants in quality improvement within the health system.

Americans are getting more connected, and in the health realm they are asking advice of, and seeking refuge in, the informal online communities that social media fosters. Organizations that use social media tactically for marketing and communications will be able to grow their online communities and have the potential of providing users with access to credible, science-based health information when, where, and how they want it. And many social media channels facilitate social engagement, viral sharing of information, and trust – exactly what health systems need to encourage their staff, physicians, and communities to embrace.

How does this link back to supply chain executives? Combine the value of mobile apps and social media and you end up with process innovation. As we transform the supply chain, we must challenge ourselves to discover how the use of mobile health apps and social media can make us more productive and efficient in our jobs. If you agree that supply chains are networks of highly interdependent processes of bringing products and services to customers by matching demand with supply, then there must be a place for social media – to collect data on product usage and best practices, and to start the open dialogue about change. The challenge will be to make it practical and possible, but I'm convinced it can be done.

I wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season – and an amazing 2011.

*Christopher J. O'Connor is Executive Vice President of GNYHA Ventures, Inc., the for-profit arm of the Greater New York Hospital Association, and President of two GNYHA Ventures companies: GNYHA Services, Inc., an acute care group purchasing organization, and Nexera, Inc., a health care and supply chain consulting firm.*