

Patient-doctor networking finds latest medium in social sites

■ Private hospitals use Facebook & Twitter for online marketing

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Private hospitals have found a new way to connect with patients: social networking sites. Fixing appointments with doctors, getting online queries answered within 24 hours, uploading your health reports for consultation—it's all happening on these websites. Moreover, these online marketing campaigns are also giving high returns to private hospitals chains like Max, Fortis and Apollo, which are now thinking of charging a fee for their online services.

Arpita Mukherjee, manager, marketing and CRM, Max Healthcare, started the Facebook initiative for the hospital in July last year, tells FE, "We receive 2,500 online enquiries a month on Facebook. Of these, 30-40% are for appointments with a particular doctor. Another 8-10% are to know if any doctor is available for a particular health problem. And the rest, 40% of them, ask about tips on diseases ranging from a simple cold to cardiac ache or cancer." The Facebook account has created business worth

₹80 lakh so far for Max by converting enquiries into sale of health treatment.

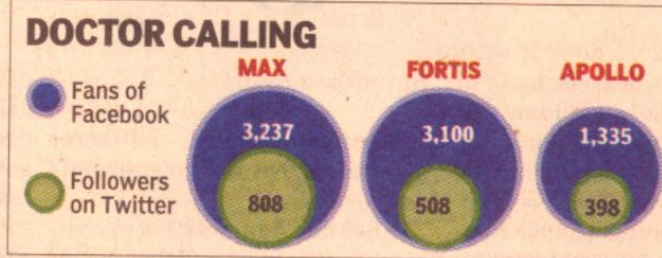
Once a serious query is uploaded, the marketing team takes it up with specialists and doctors and then replies within 24 hours to Facebook patients. Today, Max has over 3,000 fans on Facebook and 808 followers on Twitter. However, Twitter is just about posting information about

Fortis also plays on the prize temptation strategy on Facebook. It has recently started running a quiz on its Facebook page that asks questions about four common areas of enquiry—road accidents, toxic, outdoor injuries and lifestyle diseases—to members. The winners are given prizes, which is attracting a lot of people to this page. A part of the social

senior doctors to post their blogs. This initiative by Apollo was taken six months back. It has immense focus on the medical tourism aspect and a lot of YouTube videos are posted showing how patients from abroad have been cured at Apollo. "We started marketing on the website only six months back and receive 10-15 enquiries per week on Facebook. On the other hand, our website receives 100 to 200 enquiries a day. We have the same team to cater to both," says Srinidhi Kartikay Chidambaram, senior GM, health communication, Apollo Hospitals.

However, the challenge amongst all this remains to get senior doctors to directly interact with patients through blogs or posting messages, confesses Ranjana from Fortis.

Max's Mukherjee is more optimistic, "Going forward, even top doctors like Dr P Chowbey, who is the chairman for MAS (minimal access surgery), Max Institute of Surgical Sciences, want to get on Facebook and connect with their patients directly. This is the trend we will see in the future."



the hospital. "Patients can also upload their previous health reports on Facebook to have a better opinion from the doctor. For international queries, we also have video conferencing for a face-to-face consultation with the doctor," says Mukherjee.

Right now, the facility is free, but the hospital plans to have a payment gateway to facilitate this consultation, says Mukherjee.

media campaign of Fortis is taken care by an agency, Ibibo. Ranjana Smetacek, director, marketing and corporate communications, Fortis, says, "Our Facebook fans have increased from 1,400 in December last year to 3,200 in March this year."

Apollo Hospitals also has 1,335 members on its Facebook page, which is a platform to invite patients to show their concerns and even