

Poster presentation

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P15-17. Social media as a tool for engaging and educating audiences around HIV vaccine research and clinical trial participation

S Sitar*, BI Hartman, BS Graham and JE Ledgerwood

Address: Clinical Trials Core, Vaccine Research Center, NIAID, NIH, Bethesda, MD, USA

* Corresponding author

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Background

The success of an HIV vaccine clinical trial depends not only on scientific discovery but also upon the participation of healthy volunteers. In HIV vaccine clinical research, strategic and timely information dissemination to target audiences strengthens a culture of awareness, understanding, and support for trial participation. Traditional approaches for information sharing have included print media, radio, television, and face-to-face engagement. As trends in online use surge among all populations, the Vaccine Research Center (VRC) Clinical Trials Core (CTC) has launched a communications initiative utilizing social media.

Methods

In 2007, the VRC CTC began utilizing social media venues YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook, and Craigslist to communicate with priority populations. The VRC also undertook a website revision to better engage online audiences. Social media and website analytics have been closely monitored to optimize visitor's experience and takeaways by tracking navigation pathways, referral links and visit frequency. The referral source for clinical trial participants has also been monitored for links to social media.

Results

The revised Vaccine Research Center website receives an average of 137 visits per day with an average visit length of 4:23 minutes, totaling 11,453 visits for Q1 2009. Social media sources account for nearly 25% of referring domains for website traffic and 16% of referral sources named by VRC clinical trial participants.

Conclusion

The regular and timely utilization of social media venues broadens VRC CTC outreach capacity. A valuable return on investment is seen in both website visitor traffic and in volunteer referral sources. Website analytics have guided investment into new features i.e. e-card marketing and online participant screening. User and outcome analysis of social media venues has also informed decision-making for greater entry into new media utilization including micro-blogging. The use of social media enables interactive communication, content exchange and the opportunity to reach broader audiences.