

# Military Health System (MHS) Taps Into Social Networking Tools in Healthcare

✘ [Nextgov.com's](#) Bob Brewin reported June 8, 2009 that the Military Health System (MHS) has added social networking tools to its web portal serving 1.4 million people on active duty. The social networking tools are designed to connect with the 18-24 year-old demographic which makes up a large portion of the active duty personnel.

In addition to MySpace, FaceBook, and Twitter, Brewin notes:

*The agency also uses sites such as YouTube to reach to the younger age group with videos on subjects ranging from [prosthetic legs](#) to [golf therapy clinics](#) for combat wounded veterans to a [short profile of an occupational therapist](#) who works with combat-wounded veterans.*

*The video on prosthetic legs had the most views last month. The second-most-viewed video was a 2008 video on the [Bataan Memorial Death March](#) at White Sands Missile Range, N.M., which features Army medic Staff Sgt. Matthew Sims, an indication that troops crave more than just medical information. Kilpatrick said MHS posted 66 videos on YouTube in May, with the top five viewed 3,785 times.*

The portal has been available for about two years, but the Twitter feed was just launched in March.

The MHS web portal is impressive as is their stated mission: *The Military Health System mission is to provide optimal Health Services in support of our nation's military mission* "anytime, anywhere."

---

# Learn This: Twitter, Social Networking, and Micro-blogging



Twitter is a combination of two concepts, **social networking** and **micro-blogging**. When combined, they create a fascinating way for people to communicate and keep in touch. Let's explore social networking and micro-blogging individually first.

## Social Networking

This is the Myspace, and [Facebook](#) you've heard so much about. You already know what networking is – you create, build, and maintain personal and professional relationships to meet

people, find opportunities, and learn new things. Successful practice managers are constantly networking to be in the know and stay ahead of the curve. Now add the social aspect of it to the equation. *Social* networking means starting with people you already know, and using that as a jumping off point. Take your existing network of contacts and digitize them to build an on-line community.

Think about your contact list in your address book, email, phone, or Blackberry. You have everyone in there: colleagues, friends, family. What if you also had access to the contact lists of everyone in *their* contact lists? There would be duplicate entries but there would also be a lot of people in this “friends of friends” list that you didn’t know before.

You would probably see a lot of new names and faces, some of whom you might want to talk to about your organization, their organization, your product, their service, their hobbies, even ask out on a date!

When you walk into a room and see a friend talking to someone you don’t know, you go and say hello to your friend, and introduce yourself to the stranger- **you are building your network by social networking!**

The differences between various social networking sites ([see the MMP post on LinkedIn](#)) will be explored in a later article, but all social networking sites have one thing in common – they are designed to help you meet new people through common friends, interests, pasts, and goals.

## Micro-blogging

It’s blogging, but smaller. But what’s blogging? “Blog” is short for “web log”, and it is keeping an online journal of

writings, pictures, and other multimedia, as well as news items and content found on the web. Some blogs are just places where people write about their feelings and activities so other people can read them. Some blogs are focused on a topic- like [ManageMyPractice.com](http://ManageMyPractice.com) focuses on health care administration. But all blogs are simply websites that are updated by their authors fairly frequently around some common theme.

How does blogging become “micro”? By shrinking it down to its bare essence and relaying the heart of the message, communicating the necessary. How could this be of use to you?

What if you set up a system where your kids received updates when you were going to be home later than usual from work, telling them they were allowed to have a soda with their homework before TV, and what would be for dinner when you arrived? Or maybe your kids need to update you when their plans change. What if all your colleagues were updating each other about the goings-on at a professional conference so they could decide on the fly which events to attend, and share their experiences, and decide where everyone would be meeting afterward.

Anything that could be helped by contacting an entire group of people quickly with short message could benefit from micro-blogging.

## **Twitter puts it all together**

Twitter takes these two concepts, and merges the whole shebang with your mobile device. **Twitter lets you easily microblog to your social network over your mobile device.** You don't have to use a cell phone or a Blackberry to use Twitter- you can send and receive updates over the web, and through a variety of

third party providers.

If you want to get started, go to the Twitter homepage at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), and click the green button that says “JOIN THE CONVERSATION”. You will create a username and password, and start adding contacts and you’ll soon be able to make your first micro-blog post (they call them “tweets”).

On Twitter, anyone you want to receive updates from is someone you are “following”, and anyone who is receiving your messages is one of your “followers”. You can also send messages directly to just one user, or set up groups of people to receive certain updates – your co-workers don’t have to see your notes to your kids, and vice-versa. You can also do fun things, like upload a little picture of yourself to be your icon that people will see when they are on Twittera.

## **Now it's time to supercharge your cell phone**

But you don’t have to ever go to the site if you don’t want to! The real power of Twitter is that it can let you do all these short internet communications (micro-blogging) right from your cell phone. Basic text messages that you may already use on your cell phone (called “[SMS messages](#)“) can be used to send and receive messages from Twitter. Just link your Twitter account to a mobile phone in your Twitter settings, and then you can send your updates as text messages to 40404. Incoming Twitter messages from the users you follow will show up as incoming texts from Twitter, but with labels to show you which user the update is from. You can also customize your mobile updates, so you only get messages from certain users. If you follow some people who are heavy

updaters, you might get tired of constant alerts of new text messages. Also be sure you understand your cell phone's text messaging plan – Twitter is free to use, but if you don't have unlimited messaging on your phone, it could be easy to run up a big bill.

Once you have your Twitter up and running on your mobile phone things get really interesting, as now you've basically turned your cell phone service into an internet chat room. And in terms of business, that gives you near constant connection.

Twitter users are often the first people to know the newest information, and love to post updates about it online. It's an interesting way to see what's new in the world – finding out what people are talking about literally “right then”.

Plus it creates an interesting crowd of which to ask questions: What's going on tonight? Can anyone recommend good seafood on the north side of town? Is anyone getting anything out of this conference?

The brilliance of Twitter is that it so easily connects people on all different types of computers and cell phone platforms.

Twitter can seamlessly create networks of people communicating for mutual benefit, and provide an interesting new way to keep on top and keep in touch.

To Recap:

1. Social Networking = networking with your friends' friends
2. Micro-blogging = little missives without all the niceties and all the heart
3. Twitter = #1 + #2 (little missives to your friends' friends' friends)
4. How can you leverage this technology to make your practice more efficient and productive?

**Note from Mary Pat:** How can Twitter be used in a medical practice setting? Here are a few ways – I'm sure you can

think of others. If your doctor is running late, use direct messages to Twitter patients to let them know right away that they can arrive later or reschedule their appointment.

Likewise, when an earlier opening is available, Twitter a patient to see if they could fill your appointment time.

Twitter your doc to let him/her know about schedule changes that would affect what s/he is doing right now.

And to get you started on Twitter, my Twitter name is "Mary\_Pat\_Whaley."