**Does The Patient Or Client Want To Be Featured On Social Media?**

Have you observed the latest trend on social media? It’s not a new meme or hashtag. It’s the phenomenon of people posting about loved ones who are ill or even dying.

Why is this happening? It probably seems like the easiest way to keep everyone in your friends and family network in the loop. But have those who post considered whether the patient wants to be featured on social media?

Think back over the last few months. Have you seen:

1. Selfies of family members at a hospice patient’s bedside posing with a person who appears to be sleeping or at least half-asleep.
2. Videos of patients who have dementia, are recovering from strokes, and/or doing rehab exercises.
3. Lengthy, personal updates about a patient’s health that are several paragraphs long.  Some of these posts include detailed information on diagnosis, medications, surgeries, and prognosis.  Many of these updates feature graphic descriptions of symptoms the patient is experiencing.

Perhaps these patients understand that their health progress will be featured on social media.  Or maybe the family members believe there is implied consent for posting.  After all, digital natives like Millennial and Generation Z patients may very well assume that such photos or videos of themselves will be uploaded straight to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or even Snapchat.  But the vast majority of photographs and videos being posted in hospital or nursing home settings are of Baby Boomers and Traditionalists who may not realize their health status is being shared.

What can we do?

**Family member & friends:**  If you want to post about a sick or dying loved one, ask if he or she is okay with it.  While many family members will understand if you send out a text, e-mail, or update a private page like [www.lotsahelpinghands.org](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.org/) so close relatives are in the know, many may object to broad-based updates to all of your extensive network of contacts (and their contacts, depending on your privacy settings).

Also, consider the last time you took a sick day.  Would you welcome the prospect of someone posting a picture or video of you?

**Healthcare professionals:**  If you observe this behavior, remind family caregivers that they should seek the loved one’s permission before sharing.  Talk to them about HIPPA, confidentiality, as well as respecting the dignity of their loved ones.  Suggest that they consider more private ways to share information such as [www.lotsofhelpinghands.org](http://www.lotsofhelpinghands.org/).

**Jennifer L. FitzPatrick, MSW, LCSW-C, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is a speaker, consultant, author and founder of Jenerations Health Education, Inc. One of less than 800 Certified Speaking Professionals worldwide, Jennifer is the author of Reimagining Customer Service in Healthcare and Cruising Through Caregiving: Reducing The Stress of Caring For Your Loved One. She was a gerontology instructor at Johns Hopkins University's Certificate on Aging program for over a decade and has been featured on ABC, CBS, Sirius XM and in *Forbes, U.S. News & World Report, Redbook, Fast Company* and countless other media outlets. Her board appointments include serving as a Care Advisory Board Member for Seth Rogen & Lauren Miller Rogen's non-profit HFC (Hilarity for Charity). For more information please go to** [**www.jenerationshealth.com**](http://www.jenerationshealth.com) **.**