

# Physician's Weekly®

## The Medical Industry Masters Its New Domain

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The medical community is one of the last industries to effectively leverage the Internet to help empower medical professionals online. Surveys and studies have suggested that nearly 380,000 practicing physicians are increasingly relying on the Internet for professional purposes. However, a gap still exists between physicians and their ability to harness the power of this valuable resource to enhance their practice, patient care, and communications. There are plenty of .com, .net, .org, and other domains for physician practice websites, but they do not specifically identify physicians as members of the medical community.

### **A Domain for Physicians**

MaxMD has recently introduced a new domain for physicians—called .md—designed to benefit all healthcare participants. It's the only domain dedicated to the unique needs of the medical community, providing the medical industry with new standards for content, communication, and healthcare research. Some of the many constituents who can take advantage of this subject-specific domain include physicians and hospitals as well as medical associations, medical students and residents, pharmaceutical and medical device companies, and patient groups.

The .md domain allows its users to create personalized, permanent, and portable identities online (Table 1). Information can be located quickly by patients using the Internet, which in turn can enhance patient care and communication within the medical community. The domain enables physicians to have their own Internet arena, focusing on specific concerns within the healthcare industry.

### **An Advisory Board Addresses Critical Issues**

An advisory board—the .md Online Medical Advancement Council—has been created to ensure that users of the .md domain will be given a forum to voice key concerns and issues relating to medicine and the Internet. The board comprises impartial, well-respected professionals who represent medical academia, online privacy issues, and medical education as well as others. The goal of this board is to create a platform from which to raise issues such as accessibility and reliability, relevance of information, online security, and patient confidentiality so as to spark a dialogue that can affect positive

change. These issues have understandably and justifiably contributed to the slow response of the medical community in fully embracing the Internet as a tool to enhance patient care, but this advisory board's purpose is to diminish the impact of these factors.

### Clarifying Security and Confidentiality Issues is Important

In general, many physicians are unclear on the security and confidentiality issues involved when using the Internet for professional purposes and services. Not only are there a wide range of technical issues, but there are also many legal and regulatory requirements, such as HIPAA, to consider. Many physicians are unaware that posting certain types of patient information on a website could be in violation of HIPAA regulations if they do not follow the appropriate requirements and procedures. For example, some hospitals post new-birth announcements and photos of babies on their website. Not only is this a potential violation of HIPAA regulations, but it could pose a real threat of identity fraud and theft. Identity thieves can access legitimate names and other personally identifiable information to create fraudulent accounts.

The idea behind .md is to give physicians a better way to communicate with the healthcare community and a safer way to use the Internet so that they are not creating unnecessary risks as a result of posting or transmitting seemingly harmless information.

*Ms. Herold has indicated to Physician's Weekly that she has or has had no financial interests to report.*

#### REFERENCE LINKS:

MaxMD is the official provider of .md domain names in the U.S. It was founded in 2003 to develop a subject-specific Internet domain that addresses the unique needs of the medical community. The company also provides supporting services and web-based resources designed to facilitate online peer-to-peer communication and patient health management activities. For more information, go to <http://www.max.md/>.

MaxMD's **.md** Online Medical Advancement Council provides information and notes for physicians so that they can access different types of issues involved with leveraging the Internet. Go to <http://www.medcouncil.md>.

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Ms. Herold co-authored a book with Kevin Beaver titled "The Practical Guide to HIPAA Privacy and Security Compliance." To find out more information, go to <http://www.rebeccaerold.com/>.

Table 1

## Unique Benefits of the .md Domain

The .md domain has the ability to allow physicians to:

- Create a personalized, permanent, and portable web identity.
- Be located quickly on the Internet in the only Internet domain dedicated to the medical community.
- Recapture "share of mind" with their patients through relevant and reliable web-based resources.
- Access specialized online resources and interactive tools designed to facilitate and enhance peer collaboration, patient communication, and healthcare outcomes in new and innovative ways.

Source: MaxMD. Available online at [www.max.md/pdf/FactSheet.pdf](http://www.max.md/pdf/FactSheet.pdf).

The Department of Health and Human Services also provides information on HIPAA compliance efforts. Go to <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>.

For information on privacy breaches, go to <http://www.medcouncil.md/pdf/RespondingtoPrivacyBreaches.pdf>.

For information on handling HIPAA complaints, go to <http://www.medcouncil.md/pdf/HandlingHIPAAComplaints.pdf>.