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Patients' blogs keep concerned friends in the loop

A little more than a month ago I received a worrisome e-mail that my doctor, [Noel Nequin](#), had suffered a serious head injury.

Nequin is head of cardiac rehab at Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago, and we've been well acquainted since he treated me for mystery chest pains five years ago. Yet we're not close enough that I'd feel comfortable calling his home or office asking for updates on his condition, details of his accident and so on.

So I was glad that the e-mail included a link where I could sign up for access to Nequin's online "CarePage," a combination Web log and message board that functions something like a MySpace page for the ailing.

"Many people have been inquiring about him so I would like to share some information with everyone," said the first in a series of near-daily updates posted by Nequin's wife, Dawn. She described in detail how her husband had slipped on the ice March 6 while walking the family dog, hit his head on the sidewalk, and, nearly three hours later, asked to be taken to the hospital complaining of a headache and weakness in his leg.

"Within minutes he was having a CAT scan, and in a few more minutes we knew he had a brain bleed," she wrote.

In the entries that have followed, she's kept an online community of friends, neighbors, colleagues and patients up to date on the advances and setbacks in his recovery.

I'd seen crisis blogs before -- personal Web sites chronicling catastrophic life events -- but this was the first time I'd seen a site dedicated to the specific needs of hospital patients.

Just lucky, I guess.

TLContact Inc., the Northwest Side company that oversees [CarePages](#), has created more than 50,000 such pages, according to a spokeswoman. [CaringBridge](#), a competing service based near Minneapolis, and [theStatus.com](#), a third major competitor based in Anchorage, claim roughly the same numbers of pages, most of them generated in the last few years as word has spread about their availability.

"Most people don't find out about them until a friend goes into the hospital and starts one," said theStatus founder Mark Pierson.

Such sites have been around nearly 10 years, are free, easy to use and fairly secure -- families can control access to them via passwords and invitation lists. Though the various companies contract with hospitals for branding and promotional purposes, any patient anywhere can sign up and use any of the services.

They relieve family members and patients from the tedious job of telling the same story over and over, while the accompanying message areas become a forum for encouragement and prayers.

They offer an advantage for health-care professionals as well. Having the family post updates online allows them to skirt the awkwardness and even legal peril that newly stringent medical privacy regulations have added to such simple questions as "How's he doing?"

With Nequin, that answer is “He’s doing OK.”

He has a long road back, but as a former ultra-marathoner he has what it takes to conquer long roads. If you know him – and you might if you’re part of Chicago’s running scene, where he’s a veteran medical adviser -- and want to follow his progress online, [write to me](#) and I’ll put you in touch with his wife.

When I visited Nequin at Swedish Covenant Wednesday morning I’d been fully briefed by his CarePage and so didn’t have to trouble him for what my father calls an organ recital.

Instead we talked about other things, including running. Neither of us have been doing much of it lately --- his excuse is far better than mine -- but I vowed to enter Chicago’s [Shamrock Shuffle](#) 8K next March if he’d do the same. We shook on it.

If our little jog turns into a race, don’t bet against him.