

Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility Forum

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Editorial

In 2011, the Society for Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility (SREI) formed a new committee, the SREI Online Networking and Communications (SONC) committee to assist its members in discovering a means to communicate in a more secure, private, and focused manner. The SONC committee surveyed all the members of the SREI, investigating how members communicated. The electronic survey yielded 188 respondents who detailed their communication and networking preferences as practicing reproductive endocrinology and infertility physicians. Though not surprising, given the issues with social and group communication platforms, this does not mirror the technologic revolution experienced in nearly all other facets of society.

This low level of utilization may represent user dissatisfaction or distrust of currently available platforms, most of which do not provide a private, secure, and enriched audience for their communication goals. Indeed, when asked if they would be interested in participating in a private members-only forum hosted by SREI for physicians, 80% responded favorably. The most common reasons cited in the needs assessment were a desire for general networking, a place to present difficult cases, a mechanism to get advice, and a place to discuss technology and protocols-the old curbside consultation!

The SREI Forum was created as the "virtual hallway" in which curbside consultations across the spectrum, from patient care, to technology validation and implementation, to best business practices, to general networking, could occur concomitantly in a safe and secure space.

Once launched, participation and use rose quickly. Currently there are more than 500 active users, 38 forums hosting about 300 active communication threads, and almost 1,000 individual posts. The SREI forum has emerged as a promising solution that balances the need for group communication with security and privacy in a central digital gathering area. It evolved to include

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"VIP" guest moderators, leaders across the field of male and female reproductive medicine, who lend their expertise to practitioners across the country in ways no curbside consultation could ever have been imagined to take place. The rapid adoption of the SREI Forum may also be explained by the size of the population it addresses. Most SREI physicians are familiar, at least in part, with one another, making the interactions eponymous. The same cannot be said of a forum for internists, for example, where the sheer volume of members would make everyone virtually anonymous.

Both society and the practice of medicine are evolving in a setting of ever-greater connectivity. The power of coming together to solve problems is not novel, but has never been so accessible. Indeed, many would argue it might be too accessible and perhaps fragmented. There is a need, particularly in the setting of professional and medical discussions, for dedicated platforms for these group communications and networking.