



### **Social Media Steps into the O.R.**

Seven years ago, my newborn daughter had open heart surgery to fix an area of her heart that had not properly formed. We were very fortunate that our daughter was in the wonderful hands of the [pediatric cardiac surgery](#) unit of the Lucille Packard Children's Hospital. From her surgeon, all the way down to the administrative staff, they did their best to explain open heart surgery and all that would be involved.

What we discovered, though, was that all the explanations and facts nevertheless left significant gaps in our understanding of what our daughter would be going through, and what we would be going through as her parents. As our rational minds analyzed and assessed the information, our emotional understanding was left untended. Explanation is not a substitute for the experience that our emotions require.

I just read an article that may help parents and others facing serious medical issues. I love social media, and now social media has stepped into the operating room.

At Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, the director of digital media, Michael Schmidt, used an application called "Instagram" to [document the open heart surgery of 3-year-old Emily Stone](#) via his iPhone. Instagram is a photo sharing service used by social media lovers everywhere to add a creative flare to their images and post them to their timelines on social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

Like my wife and I, this toddler's parents recognized the need for quality, first-hand information about pediatric heart surgery and what it's like to experience as a family. So they embraced the opportunity to allow other parents to glimpse into the process they experienced with their daughter's surgery.

The digital media team posted photos of the surgery on Twitter in 10-minute increments, as well as every hour on Facebook. They also created a live timeline of the surgery via the hospital's blog. Of the entire 8-hour procedure (4-hours preparation, 4-hours for surgery), 46 photos were posted and viewed by over 218,000 people.

According to Schmidt, comments poured in to encourage the family and wish the little girl well. He also said that at least six families commented that they now feel more assured about their children's upcoming heart surgeries after watching it.

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. Although nothing can truly prepare you for the experience of seeing your child endure such a serious medical procedure, the 46,000 words these photos represent will undoubtedly prove helpful for families and patients awaiting similar procedures.