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Editorial

A Reflection on Social Media Usage in Healthcare and Urology: An Opportunity for Research -

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Social media is a broad term that encompasses many Internet based sites through which online-users communicate and disseminate information. Social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are redefining the concept of community as online users can now exchange ideas, messages, videos, and other forms of user-content within seconds [1]. Latest statistics from 2015 have shown that nearly 65% of US adults are using social media networking sites, which is a ten-fold increase since 2005 [2]. This trend has been far reaching over the past decade with a wide variety of ages, ethic groups, and socioeconomic classes joining in [2].

The healthcare community, including hospital networks, healthcare professionals, and students, has not been immune to the growing influence of social media and has been presented with the challenge of harnessing its power for good whether this be student education, inter-hospital collaboration, or the distribution of valid, up to date healthcare initiatives. In recent years, the presence of healthcare community members on social media networks has been rising with its tide of popularity. A recent study by Griffis et al. presented a snapshot of social media usage amongst 3,371 US hospitals. They found that 99.41% had a Facebook account and over 50% had accounts with up to four different networking sites [3]. Furthermore, 100% of US medical schools (132 total) have an official school website and 95.45% have Facebook accounts, not including secondary accounts created by student groups and organizations, which are affiliated with the primary medical school [4]. A study by the American College of Surgeons of 57 residency programs found that 100% of programs had a website that listed faculty members and from there 25.7% of faculty members had an identifiable social media account [5]. From these studies, it is clearly evident that social media is being utilized by many members of the healthcare community.

The utilization of social media networks by residency programs is still under investigation. One interesting facet that has emerged, however, is how residency programs and applicants have used social media pages to determine which applicants to interview and even where applicants wish to apply. A 2012 study of general surgery and surgery subspecialty residency programs reported that 17% of respondents gained information about applicants from social media pages leading 33% to rank an applicant lower [6]. Applicants, however, are just as likely to judge residency programs based on their social media presence. In a study of 992 trainees, 27% reported accessing a graduate program's social media page during the application process and 10% report these sites having influenced their decision on where to apply [7].

The question remains how the field of urology, and more specifically urology residency programs, is/are adapting social media networking into everyday practice? A 2012 American Urological Association (AUA) survey of 382 urologists, including residents, fellows, and attendings, demonstrated that 74% had at least one social media networking account including Facebook (93%), LinkedIn (46%), and Twitter (36%) [8]. Furthermore, of these urologists surveyed, 28% report using social media for professional purposes [8]. Most research to date on how urologists are using social media professionally is in regards to annual meetings and online journal club initiatives. Three recent studies have demonstrated the wide use of Twitter at national and international urology meetings [9-11]. At one annual meeting of the Irish Society of Urology, Twitter provided a unique platform through which meeting participants and 'virtual followers' could meet and exchange thoughts on the field of urology [9]. At this two day meeting, one third of conference attendees used Twitter. Over 700 tweets were posted of which 208 were from remote users not attending the conference and 55% of these tweets contained scientific content regarding urology [9]. Another avenue through which urologists have tried to create an online community is through an international urology journal club. Thangasamy et al. created a 12-month urology specific journal club experience during which 189 participants from 19 different countries used Twitter to engage in live scientific discussions on recent articles published in the field [12]. Urologists have clearly found unique ways to generate a scientific community aimed to educate fellow urologists and the public. Many aspects of social media usage in the field remain unknown, however. For example, very little information is available on how and if urology residency programs are utilizing social media for education, outreach, or program advertising. As the field becomes more globally connected through social media, it will be important to train future physicians in its use and possibilities. Therefore, research regarding the use of social media networking in urology training is needed to determine its current shortcomings and future possibilities for utilization.

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