

Social media in clinical radiology: have you updated your status?

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the social media revolution has had a huge impact on world industry and how people communicate. This is no different in the healthcare landscape where it has captured audiences of healthcare professionals and patients alike. Social media is defined as a 'set of interactive technology tools designed to encourage social networking and dialogic communication in virtual communities and networks' (1). Social media platforms include online forums, networking sites, online professional networks, content posting sites and research forums (2). A recently published comprehensive analysis of social media encourages health care staff to embrace the 'e-society' and social media revolution as it has shown to provide improved outcomes for healthcare staff and patients (3). This article discusses the role of social media in the context of clinical radiology.

Social media types

Wide ranges of social media tools are available categorized by their use and function (1). The overall aim of social media is to connect people and encourage discussion and networking between like minded individuals. Many of the social media tools serve multiple purposes, however they can be divided broadly into the following categories. Forums or blogs are live online journals, which serve as a portal for authors to share opinions and experiences on various topics (e.g., doctors.net). Microblogging sites are more concise and mobile friendly versions of blogs designed to broadcast small messages to large volumes of people (e.g., Twitter). These have further evolved into image blogs (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest, snapchat). Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) allow browsers to build online profiles, share

links and updates about themselves with their communities and network with a wide range of people internationally. There has been an evolution to more professional social networks to aid in recruitment and research (e.g., LinkedIn, Xing, Researchgate). There are multiple content holding websites that interlink with other social media platforms allowing video and pictorial information to be shared (e.g., Youtube) (1).

Why should radiologists engage with social media?

Education

Social media provides access to a wide variety of open access resources, which promote medical education and professional development. Organizations such as Radiopaedia, The Society of Radiologists in Training, American College of Radiology (ACR) Aunt Minnie and many others post interesting cases daily on twitter to stimulate learning and discussion. Many of these can be found by searching #FOAMrad (FOAM = free open access medicine) (2). In addition to this certain consultant radiologists post more exam focused cases for trainees to prepare for the fellowship or board exams. This brings out multiple different opinions and dimensions to different cases and a wide range of andragogy learning. At any one time there could be a trainee in Australia discussing a case with a medical student in Zimbabwe.

Social media has erased international and hierarchical boundaries thus raising awareness of important international education and research meetings. International radiology societies such as Radiology Society for North America (RSNA), British Institute of Radiology (BIR), Royal College of radiologists (RCR) and the ACR are increasingly

embracing usage of social media tools such as Twitter to engage delegates, trainees and international collaborators; this has been shown to improve involvement, cohesion and collaboration amongst delegates (4,5). In addition at the international conferences discussions on the lectures and learning points are encouraged on twitter so that delegates and people who were not able to attend can benefit from the ongoing discussions.

Professional networking

In Europe the largest professional social networks are LinkedIn and Xing. These create a borderless environment enabling interactions between global healthcare leaders, academics and clinicians (6). Groups are formed and global discussions on key issues in radiology can take place in real time. Social media also promotes exciting opportunities for innovation through collaboration with other specialties thus improving interdisciplinary relations. Radiologists are able to exchange ideas on an international scale enhancing the understanding of practice and challenges facing the field globally. These professional networks also allow radiologists to search for new training and working opportunities around the world. Furthermore, the social media tool research gate has improved access to open source research and has significantly improved the ease at which collaborations can be formed. In addition clinicians and scientists working on similar projects can share papers, data and ideas without being physically present at conferences.

Specialty awareness

The RCR in UK endeavors in its 2014-2016 strategy to increase awareness of the radiology awareness as a specialty (7). These ambitions are similar in other radiology organizations worldwide. The revolution in social media enables radiologists to showcase their roles and responsibilities in the healthcare setting, and provides an interface to engage with patients and other healthcare members. Social media can therefore be a tool to improve patient education; this can be in the form of twitter feeds or health blogs tailored to discuss essential or topical issues in the media or local community (2). This may increasingly provide valuable self-management insight and disease prevention for patients. In the context of radiology it could give them a better insight into the implications of radiation and how important imaging is to their diagnoses

and ongoing management. Patients may find reassurance in social media by providing a knowledge library consistent with up to date evidence; a feature of social media, which is extremely beneficial in the management of chronic conditions. Social media also enables the opportunity to provide instant feedback serving as a tool to identify areas of improvement for the future (2). For patients, social media provides an environment for people with common problems to discuss these making the overall patient journey better with a reduction in the use of vital healthcare resources.

Become a key person of influence

Social media has allowed people with specific interests in certain topics to become key people of influence on this topic by regular postings and involvement in online discussions in this topic area. This provides the environment where newspapers, magazines and TV researchers search for people who can meet journalists to discuss their work. Even an introverted person who finds it difficult in environments with lots of people can exert their knowledge and opinions and can start to direct a specific area within a speciality. It is strongly recommended to promote your research and ongoing learning on your social media so that people interested in your work connect with you and take interest in your work. It is no longer a requirement to be a professor to hold an important role amongst your peers in a certain topic area.

Assessing performance

In the current day and age constant assessment of an organization's or a professional's performance is judged on reviews from customers. The tourism industry has been completely revolutionised by the forum Tripadvisor. This has now been transformed into the medical world with websites such as iwantgreatcare.co.uk and ratemds.com. Radiologists should be proud of their performance and their role in a patient's journey and should be active in collecting feedback to display their strengths and learn from areas suggested for improvement. Use of these tools can strengthen a radiologists reputation amongst patients and colleagues.

Pitfalls of e-society and social media

Borderless communication and an online presence for

a radiologist can often provide easy access and a trail of a doctor's private and public persona. Social media also provides an easy check for employers and organizations therefore doctors online presence, whilst being beneficial in some ways, could adversely affect future jobs and employment (8). The GMC stresses that 'standards expected of doctors do not change because they are communicating through social media as opposed to other forms of traditional media' (9). It is therefore critical that doctors and healthcare professionals behavior online adheres to the duties of a doctor in accordance to overseeing organization which in the UK refers to the GMC's Good Medical Practice document (10).

Confidentiality is another key issue and whilst social media can be a powerful education tool, it is essential that all information and images posted online should be entirely anonymised (2). Patient consent must be appropriately sought before case disclosures are made on social media.

From a patient perspective, the increased self-education through social media risks the possibility of becoming unnecessarily or inadequately concerned, due to lack of sufficient knowledge or contradicting information on social media; this can jeopardize patient safety especially if some patients use the social media as a replacement for traditional forms of consultation (1).

Conclusions

Radiology is well known for working at the forefront of hardware technology. However, now radiologists need to engage at the forefront of online software in the form of social media.

It serves as a vehicle of individual and specialty development as well as creating a borderless engine to promote growth of the specialty. Social media growth will exponentially rise as the new crop of technology savvy radiologists emerges. The question is, will you be part of it?

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Footnote

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