

The Positive Implications of Social Media in the Field of Medicine

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Introduction

- Since the creation of social media, beginning in 2004 with the launch of Facebook, there has been a significant increase in the use of these platforms as convenient tools for staying informed about society. Specifically in medicine, patients now turn to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to spread disease awareness, enabling them to make more informed decisions about their health.
- Healthcare providers use social media and video technology to enhance patient care by clarifying medications, explaining conditions, and addressing unanswered questions.

Ethical Principles

- **Beneficence:** Increasing health awareness and education can help individuals recognize their symptoms and empower them to address concerns with medical professionals.
- **Non-maleficence:** Medical advice should be taken from credible sources based on evidence-proven research.
- **Justice:** Informational social media posts should be accessible to everyone; videos should have closed-captioning and accessible language translations when possible.
 - Social media gives a voice to those without one, enabling individuals to advocate for issues like healthcare equality and access to costly medication (Chirumamillia & Gulati, 2021).
- **Autonomy:** Communication of medical content through social media gives caregivers and patients knowledge for autonomous, informed decisions. (Shlobin NA et al., 2022).

Pros

- **Early detection** - The more information people have, the more likely they are to recognize and address their symptoms earlier.
- **Informed and Empowered Patients:** Learning from others' experiences helps guide questions and better navigate their healthcare.
- **Connection:** People can connect with others who have similar conditions to learn from their experiences and receive peer support.
- **Accessibility and Cost Effective:** Social media provides widespread access for people of all backgrounds to communicate about disease prevention, public health, and research.
- **Professional Development:** Ability to share information with other providers, facilitating collaborations.

Cons

- **Misinformation:** Can be spread online by influencers without proper credentials.
- **Misleading Generalizations:** Clinical presentations manifest differently for many patients, so it may mislead people into thinking they do not have a disease or a need to be screened
- **Demographic barriers:** Some populations, such as the elderly and those with a low socioeconomic status, do not have access and/or interest in social media.
- **Mental Health:** In general, social media can negatively affect mental health by contributing to body dysmorphia, low self-esteem, addiction, and harassment.

Case Studies

- Carli Williams, 33, discovered a small lump in her breast, which doctors initially dismissed as likely being a benign cyst. Inspired by Instagram influencer Delia Chatwan, who openly shared her breast cancer diagnosis at age 28, Williams decided to pursue further testing. The results revealed stage 2 ductal carcinoma breast cancer that had metastasized to her lymph nodes (Kindelan, 2022).
- A study by Leong et al. (2022) evaluated the impact of a social media-based education program on patients with diabetes, focusing on enhancing knowledge, attitudes, and self-care activities. This intervention was found to be particularly effective for patients with low health literacy, demonstrating its potential as a tool for diabetes education during the COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face interactions were limited.
 - The social media-based education program featured 51 videos, all designed to be accessible to patients with varying health literacy levels, which were assessed using the Newest Vital Sign (NVS) tool.
 - The videos, which used patient-oriented language and animations, fostered growth and positive attitudes to patients of all health literacy levels. This suggests that video-based education can address populations with low health literacy and can also save pharmacists time by providing basic medication knowledge and addressing general concerns. This approach could also be applied to medical conditions beyond diabetes to enhance patient experiences and understanding.

Literature Review

“Social media has the scope of reaching a wide audience to fill in the gaps in patient education. In fact, clinicians often encourage patients’ use of social media to further research their conditions” (Chirumamillia & Gulati, 2021).

“The communication capabilities provided by social media are also being used to improve clinical education...enhance clinical students’ understanding of communication, professionalism, and ethics” (Ventola CL).

“60% of physicians were found to favor interacting with patients through social media for the purpose of providing patient education and health monitoring, and for encouraging behavioral changes and drug adherence... these efforts will lead to “better education, increased compliance, and better outcomes” (Ventola CL).

“SM can be used as a potential tool to widen the reach of knowledge and information on IPC (infection prevention control) in community settings and hospitals. (Madhumathi et al., 2021).

“Approximately 70% of neurosurgeons and trainees use social media for professional purposes” (Shlobin NA et al., 2022).

Future Implications

- As social media usage continues to grow, its ability to reach a wide audience will expand, enabling more people to access valuable health information and facilitating earlier interventions for potentially life-limiting diseases.
- The time-stamped flow of social media posts ensures more current and relevant information than traditional textbooks.
- Creation of a medically certified social media platform to ensure the spread of accurate, evidence-based information.

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