

Social media in surgery

Tanka Prasad Bohara

Department of Surgery, Kathmandu Medical College Teaching Hospital.

Correspondence: Tanka Prasad Bohara, Department of Surgery, Kathmandu Medical College Teaching Hospital.

Email: tankaprasad.bohara@gmail.com

Social media has become an integral part of modern life-style. It is ubiquitously available in computer, smart televisions, and hand held devices like tablets, ipads and mobile phones. As per *www.statista.com*, there are about 2.27 billion monthly active facebook users as of January 2019.¹

The internet has 4.2 billion users out of which 3.397 billion active social media users. On average, each person has 5.54 social media accounts and the average daily time spent on social media is 116 minutes a day.²

Social media has changed the way people communicate, interact and follow individual, group or professional societies activities. Surgeons being the part of the same society are not left behind. Surgeons have adapted use of social media not only for personal but also for academic activities. For academic use, the most important trait of social media is rapid communication among surgeons and with general public. Social media provides real-time group discussion across the globe which helps in disseminating knowledge, skills and newer techniques to wider audience worldwide at a click of thumb or mouse. It also provide platform for discussing cases and clear doubts to come to a conclusion for patient management by taking opinion from experts all over the world. There are several groups within social media created by surgeons and surgical societies across the world for the above purpose. These groups are either “closed group” requiring recommendation from peers/ approval from group admin or “open group” which is open to general public as well. These “open groups” are sources of information and knowledge for patients and platform for sharing research outcomes and ideas to general public.

There are limitations to the use of social media in general and in particular to surgery and surgical education. Privacy has always been an issue with social media.^{3,4} Confidentiality of user’s information and social media uses itself is in doubt. So is the issue with confidentiality of patients whose case is discussed over social media. Usually cases are discussed in “closed group” in the social

media but we don’t know how close these closed groups are. There is always a chance of getting in/approving non health care provider into the group and we do not know how much access the social media platform provider has into the closed groups. It is also a possibility that the patient’s illness details and data are posted and discussed over the social media without consent from the patient which is a breach of confidentiality for patients. The other problem is that there is no peer review in social media before any information is disseminated. Information once sent is available to wide audience immediately leading to potential risk of disseminating incorrect, incomplete and inappropriate information.

Although social media has limitations, in this world of advancement of information technology we cannot run away or turn blind to innovations going around the social media and its use. We should be acquainted with social media and should learn the way of using social media responsibly in surgical practice keeping in mind its potential limitations.

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