

Medical student perspectives on the application of social media in higher education [Letter]

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Dear editor

We read the article by Guraya et al¹ with great interest. We were fascinated by the idea that social media could be integrated into medical curricula and be used as an educational platform in the future. As medical students who use various social networking sites (SNS) for both educational and recreational use, we wish to offer our opinion on this topic.

Guraya et al¹ suggest that social media's role in higher education is currently under-utilised and has greater potential in the future. Cheston et al² explored the effects of integrating social media tools into medical curricula. Their work found that it not only improved exam scores, but also reflective practice and empathy, both of which are essential skills for doctors. They also noted that these platforms improved learner engagement, feedback and personal development, thus reinforcing the positive effects described in the article by Guraya et al.¹

Although social media has shown a number of educational advantages, it can, arguably, be perceived to be a double-edged sword. In 2018, there were 2.32 billion monthly Facebook users,¹ with this number on course to continue to rise. A study by Andreassen³ warns us of the potential addictive aspect of social media that we must be wary of. Andreassen³ reports prevalence of SNS addiction to range from 1.6% up to 34%. Long-term excessive use of SNSs is also reported to have negative effects on health, relationships and real life social interactions, even leading to symptoms consistent with addiction, as seen in substances of abuse. As medical students we have experienced the emergence of E-learning platforms in the UK, which are designed specifically for educational purposes. Thus, it may be wise to continue using these specialised platforms, rather than advocate more extensive use of social media in these students.

Integrating a novel teaching approach into medical educational curricula would not come without its challenges, as with any new approach. Raupach et al⁴ found web-based problem-based learning (PBL) sessions to be more time consuming and have no significant difference on examination results in comparison to face-to-face PBL sessions. In addition to the time-consuming administrative process of implementing education onto platforms not specialised for this purpose. Furthermore, there are issues regarding privacy and security, as described by Smith,⁵ where students reported concerns over mixing social and professional life. In some cases, students felt the need to create separate social media accounts in order to overcome this problem.

With the ever rising popularity of social media in the 21st century, integration of social media platforms in higher education curricula could prove to be a powerful

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tool. However, further evidence based research is needed before this can be implemented across the board.

Disclosure

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