

The value of social media to you and the profession

How up to speed are you on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Snapchat? Would you know how to reach @doctorsofbc or @awruddiman, or what to do with #ilovesocialmedia or #physicianleadership? If you're like many people and professionals, these social media terms may be familiar yet applying them can be a little mind boggling. We've all heard the term *social media* and generally speaking we know what it is, yet understanding how to embrace and use it may be a little daunting for some. I am active on Twitter, but only picked it up as a communication and information forum 2 years ago.

Research shows that more and more people, including professionals, are relying on social media as their primary source of communication because it's instant and in real time. You can reach a broad audience in one click, and you can just as efficiently receive comprehensive responses on a host of topics.

But what does social media have to do with health care? Today, professional influence is increasingly derived through social media, providing a huge opportunity for physicians and health care organizations to use this communication channel to inform, to connect, and to influence.

My current social media tool of choice is Twitter. I see it as an increasingly effective way to express my thoughts, ideas, and opinions on what is occurring locally and globally and on what those interested in my thoughts (referred to as my followers) might be interested in knowing. For instance, on Twitter I have 1774 followers who range from physicians, stakeholders, government, media, friends, family, and, more broadly, the public. I have acquired follow-

ers because, I imagine, they believe the information I push out—brewing health system issues, good news or provocative media stories, or just about anything else that relates to my role as Doctors of BC president, my rural professional life, or my life as a member of a vibrant rural BC community—is of value or interest to them.

Increasingly more members of the medical profession are embracing social media as a way to connect, engage, and influence. Whether it's to share helpful medical information, stay connected on a collegial level with family and friends, or network with colleagues and peers, it helps build and foster two-way relationships.

And it's not just individuals who use social media. As an organization, Doctors of BC is very active on social media platforms such as Twitter and, more recently, Facebook, often using them to communicate key positions on important issues to the public, stakeholders, media, and our members quickly, early, and often.

At this year's CMA General Council Meeting, the hashtag #cmagc was tweeted on average 106 times per hour, and received over 68 million impressions—or, in simpler terms, it was seen and viewed over 68 million times. This allowed members who couldn't attend, key stakeholders, the public, and the media—everyone who followed that hashtag—to stay connected and to keep abreast of each turn of events at the CMA GC in real time.

One of the greatest opportunities social media provides physicians is the ability to leverage information—to highlight individual professional activities and interests, to advocate for the profession, or to influence behavior to the benefit of the health

care system. It allows us to expand our breadth of connectivity, engagement, and knowledge beyond the borders of our offices, our specialties, our hospitals, even our communities. And, in so doing, it enables doctors to position ourselves as a trusted and knowledgeable source, to fill in gaps in information, to change how the public and stakeholders view certain issues, and to strengthen our professional voice.

I recognize the hesitation some may have about being proactive on social media. Concerns over privacy and confidentiality, or inadvertently saying something that is incorrect or offensive, are important considerations. However, there is no risk to simply following someone on social media. In fact, there's a great deal of value in seeing what's being said by those you admire or respect. And as long as you're circumspect about the content of what you post and you stick to the general rule of thinking twice before you post, you will be fine.

Social media broadly reaches and connects not only the profession, but key partners and stakeholders, those interested in our activities, and the public. As physicians we have the opportunity to harness this tool and the online world to inform, to connect, and to influence. So have some fun and join the world of social media! And when you do, don't forget to "like" Doctors of BC's new Facebook page, and I would appreciate the follow on Twitter at @awruddiman. I'd be delighted to follow you back and together we can broaden our professional networks and reach.

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