

## Anaesthesiologist and social media: Walking the fine line

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### ABSTRACT

Social media use is pervasive in society and has been rapidly amalgamated into the lives of anaesthesiologists. Using social media as an educational resource and ensuring an appropriate online presence is essential for professional growth. However, there are huge lacunae in editorial responsibility, peer review, and accountability of educational content on social media networks. The anaesthesiologist needs to be aware of the numerous shortcomings and must use social media responsibly. Following etiquettes, adopting a code of conduct and a high sense of professionalism is expected from the anaesthesiologist while posting on social media. Anaesthesiologists need to decide on their social media goals, like interaction with colleagues, continuing medical education or patient education, and then register for social media accounts accordingly. The need of the hour is comprehensive social media guidelines for anaesthesiologists, endorsed by institutions, societies, and professional health-care associations in India.

**Key words:** Educational resources, just in time training, social media

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### INTRODUCTION

The digital world is now an integral part of medicine, and its presence is only likely to increase exponentially in the future. Social media use is pervasive in society and has been rapidly amalgamated into the lives of anaesthesiologists. Social media is any electronic forum that connects anaesthesiologists with other faculty, other health professionals, residents, patients, and public. Social media is intended to be social and that means engaging with others. Unlike journals or websites, where users are limited to passive viewing of content, social media facilitates knowledge sharing and social interaction on a real-time basis. Today, social media is fast becoming the first point of access of medical information for anaesthesiologists.

### SOCIAL MEDIA IN ANAESTHESIOLOGY – FROM EVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION

Man as a social animal has always relied on communication to strengthen relationships at work and in personal life. With the advent of technology, the internet, and social media, there are a tremendous variety of social networking sites,

available for use. Popular forums for social media include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Wikipedia, and LinkedIn.

“Global Anesthesiology Server Network” or the “GasNet” is the precursor for the anaesthesia-related social networking sites and has been functional since 1994. Facebook, a personal social networking site, is used to connect to individual anaesthesiologists with a mutual interest in a particular field. Nowadays, Twitter is one of the most popular social media sites among anaesthesiologists. Twitter allows anaesthesiologists to obtain up-to-the-minute updates on clinical research and news. Medical conferences have conference-specific hashtags like #ANES2014 or #AAGBI14, to allow live “tweeting” to engage attendees, promote scientific discussion, and interact with a broader audience.

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“Sermo,” one of the biggest social networks for doctors worldwide, is like a “virtual doctor lounge” and connects doctors who do not know each other. The goal of “Sermo” is medical crowd-sourcing, where real-life medical questions are answered by peers. “Doximity” is aimed at connecting you to doctors you already know, like colleagues and residents. “DailyRounds” is a service for doctors that combines elements of a social networking and a medical journal. “Medscape” and “QuantiaMD” are less of social networks and more of learning platforms for anaesthesiologists. Free Open Access Medical Education, using #FOAMed, is a movement dedicated to increased sharing of medical knowledge. WhatsApp™ application can facilitate communication within members of any surgical team and provides the anaesthesiologist with a constant update of activities performed by other team members.

Other resources for anaesthesiologists include YouTube, where numerous procedural videos and tutorials relating to anaesthesiology are available. SlideShare has diverse anaesthesiology topics uploaded as slideshows. Podcasts from American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) and Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) allow offline access to digitally prerecorded audio, video, or e-Pub files.<sup>[1]</sup> The SCCM has embraced social media and set up a “Social Media Task Force” to organize, moderate, and participate in an online journal club.

### **PROS AND CONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media is a powerful tool in the hands of the anaesthesiologist. It can benefit many professionals when used appropriately, especially in the field of education. It can serve as a platform to provide an excellent educational resource to many anaesthesiologists across the globe. Forums discuss clinical problems, unusual scenarios, share educational videos, and images encountered in day-to-day practice for the benefit of all and familiarize anaesthesiologists to recent trends. YouTube and podcasts are quickly finding a niche in regional anaesthesiology for just-in-time training.<sup>[2]</sup>

Traditional paper-based model of scientific publishing has been complemented by online supplements containing content-rich materials such as videos and full data that cannot be published on paper. Since many scientific journals do not allow free access, social media aids “literature sharing.”

In spite of all the advantages social media offers to anaesthesiologists, it has definite shortcomings. The saying “do not believe everything you read” is very appropriate for social media users. Any anaesthesiologist with a social media account can become a publisher, and there are huge lacunae in editorial responsibility, peer review, and accountability on social media networks. Very often, the authenticity of available information is questionable and plagiarism is rampant. Studies that have evaluated health-related YouTube videos for their conformity to textbook information and their sufficiency as a source for patient information have shown that videos prepared by institutes or societies were lacking in completeness of information and should be viewed for informational purposes only. Many videos were even found to be harmful to patient care, if used for educational or skill development purposes.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ANAESTHESIOLOGY: BOON OR BANE**

According to studies, nearly one-third of all patients scheduled for surgery and anaesthesia consult the internet regarding their upcoming procedure.<sup>[4]</sup> Social media also affects the choice of surgical team or hospital in a number of patients. Being active on social media, and establishing a good online reputation, has a significant positive influence on patients. Anaesthesiologists, especially pain physicians, benefit from the social networking sites, to showcase their expertise and launch new relationships.

Empowering patients through social media with anaesthesia-related information that they need to know, such as educational videos of anaesthesia techniques, prepares the patient better for the surgery and leads to more optimal outcomes. The ASA offers patients social media content, to stay up-to-date on patient information regarding anaesthesia. These include “Patient Lifeline” on Twitter, “ASA Vital Health” on Facebook, and the website “lifelinetomodernmedicine.com.”

Medical publishers are also using social media aggressively, to promote knowledge, spread ideas, and create platforms among anaesthesiologists.<sup>[5]</sup> An active Twitter account of a medical journal directly correlated with higher journal impact factor and greater number of article citations, than journals not embracing social media.<sup>[6]</sup>

Social media use has become a ubiquitous component in the life of anaesthesiologists.<sup>[7]</sup> What is debatable is whether social media is beneficial in daily professional activities, or whether it is a mere distraction. Anaesthesiologists care for patients when they are most vulnerable, and a high sense of professionalism is expected of them while on social media. In a recent study on smartphone use of anaesthesia providers from Turkey, 35.3% of respondents used social media during the anaesthetized patient care. Though the respondents claimed no negative medical consequences of smartphone use during the anaesthetized patient care, 41% had witnessed their colleagues, at least once, in a situation where use of smartphone during the anaesthetized patient care could have led to negative medical consequences.<sup>[8]</sup> With the increasing trends of its use, social media has started to emerge as a significant distractor inside the operation theater, leading to monitoring lapses and precipitating critical events.

Use of social media by anaesthesiologists for case discussions or for publicity may compromise patient's confidentiality and privacy. Online contact with patients, which breach doctor-patient relationship, may be professionally inappropriate. A post or comment is linked for an indefinite period of time and professional reputation may suffer.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR ANAESTHESIOLOGISTS**

Anaesthesiologists need to decide on their social media goals, like interaction with colleagues, continuing medical education or educating patients, and then register for social media accounts accordingly. It is also important for anaesthesiologists to know their organization's social media policy and follow it. The American Medical Association's Ethics Opinion on "Professionalism in the Use of Social Media" recommends that physicians should manage privacy settings to safeguard personal information. They should routinely monitor their own internet presence to ensure that the personal and professional information on their own sites and, to the extent possible, content posted about them by others are accurate and appropriate.

A few key considerations have to be borne in mind by the anaesthesiologist while using social media. It is imperative to maintain a safe professional distance between patients and colleagues online. No medical advice should be offered to any patient online. Anaesthesiologists should not participate in arguments on social media or make derogatory statements.

Posting photos of clinical encounters on social media is a breach of confidentiality and photographing a patient, for any purpose, requires clearly documented written consent from the patient. Anaesthesiologists should also not use social media as a tool to air their grievances and instead follow formal process for addressing such matters. In India, there is a strong necessity to have institutional and society guidelines for practitioners on use of social media, so as to ensure safe practice and also reap the maximum benefits.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **SOCIAL MEDIA: TIME TO INTROSPECT**

Anaesthesiologists active on social media must ensure that words and behavior online do not diminish their professional standing or bring the profession as a whole into disrepute. It is important to follow etiquettes and adopt a code of conduct while posting on social media. The answer does not lie in keeping online professional and personal identities separate, but in ensuring that all potential social media content is appropriate for a public space.

Educational resources on social media need to be assessed for their impact and quality before their use. It is challenging for anaesthesiologists to identify appropriate resources on social media. The Social Media Index (SMi) has been developed to help address this issue. Data from social media platforms such as Google Pageranks, Facebook Likes, Twitter Followers, and Google + Followers for blogs and podcasts have been used to derive the SMi. The SMi's stability over time and its correlation with journal impact factors suggest that it may be a stable indicator of the impact of medical education websites.<sup>[10]</sup>

"Distracted doctoring" is the phenomenon of health-care providers using electronic devices for non medical purposes during procedures. An anaesthesiologist needs to introspect the need for such behavior and ensure that such conduct does not impair patient care.

### **SUMMARY**

Social media use is omnipresent in society and is an integral part of the lives of anaesthesiologists. Using social media as an educational resource and ensuring an appropriate online presence is essential for professional growth. However, the anaesthesiologist needs to be aware of its numerous shortcomings and use social media responsibly. The need of the hour is comprehensive social media guidelines

for anaesthesiologists, endorsed by professional health-care associations in India.

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