

HOW TO... #COMMUNICATE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

After creating videos to highlight pathology's role in patient care, **Claire Kennedy** and **Rachel Berkoff** explain why they used social media to communicate their messages, and offer tips and advice on how to make the most of the medium.

One of the key aims for many people using social media is to engage and connect with other people and share their passions and interests. Social media channels, such as Twitter, can also be a fantastic learning and education resource.

Whatever your interest in pathology you will find someone on social media to connect with or to follow. You can follow organisations, experienced pathologists and biomedical scientists based in the UK and abroad, as well as those just starting their professional careers.

Many healthcare leaders and organisations have social media accounts, including the IBMS and its Chief Executive Jill Rodney, and the Royal College of Pathologists and its President Jo Martin. In addition, there are many high-profile scientists, politicians,

business leaders and academics that use social media.

Think about which social media channels you would like to use and why. South West London Pathology uses Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube as key social media channels with the aim of sharing information about pathology, highlighting our work as one of the leading NHS pathology providers in the UK, and as a recruitment tool.

The Royal College of Pathologists uses Twitter, Facebook and YouTube as their main social media channels to communicate to the general public as well as their members. A key objective of the College is to help to explain to the general public what pathology is, and why it matters. Social media is a great tool for getting this message across by engaging with other relevant organisations and stakeholders and showing how pathology can relate to these.

Be aware

If you want to get more involved in using social media, find out if your organisation has any social media guidelines or a social media policy in place. This may give you advice about what to consider if you would like to use social media. It is likely to cover what is appropriate and inappropriate to post, which channels to use and why.

If your organisation doesn't have any social media guidelines, many health organisations, such as Healthcare Professions Council and NHS Employers, have guidance.

Remember – any social media policy will not cover every scenario, so think before you post.

When photographing or filming in a laboratory, there will be lots of patient data. Make sure that none of it can be seen before you post.

A collaborative project

Up to 70% of all patient diagnoses depend on pathology, however, pathology is often considered a “back office” service.

In addition, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the work, processing pathology samples takes place behind closed doors with restricted access. Most people (including most healthcare

professionals, as well as the general public) are unaware of what happens in a hospital pathology laboratory.

South West London Pathology applied for a public engagement grant from the



Royal College of Pathologists. Instead of offering money towards producing the videos, the college thought it would be a really good opportunity to work on the project together. One of the things both organisations were really keen to highlight was the expertise involved in making diagnoses, and the role of pathologists in patient care. Many other organisations also offer grants for public engagement activity, including the IBMS.

Achieving aims

The aim was to use social media in an engaging way to raise the profile of pathology and show how essential it is to the patient pathway. South West London Pathology regularly hosts public engagement events and provides laboratory tours to hospital staff, members of the public, students and VIPs. These events always receive positive feedback and a video was one way to show parts of a laboratory tour in a visual and accessible format.

The videos (still from which are pictured, left) follow each stage of the journey of the sample, from the courier who brings the sample to the hospital, to the biomedical scientist who stains it to the consultant who looks at it under the microscope.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOP TIPS

✔ **If you're not sure which social media channel to use, set up a dummy account and try the channel for six weeks and see if you like it.** This will allow you to have a look at other accounts, see what's being posted and how others use the channel.

✔ **Knowing what your goals are will help you to determine which channel might be best**

for you, who to follow, what to post and why. For example, do you want to raise your professional profile, keep track of certain issues, or to just share information?


✔ **When you find an account you like, ask yourself why you like it?** Being able to pinpoint what you find useful or interesting will give you ideas for your own posts.

If you're using Twitter, use hashtags to promote your posts so people can find related tweets – in our social media posts we used #DiscoverPathology

✔ **Post regularly** – even if it's just sharing information you've read on another post. Allocate time every day or week to review social media activity and post, share or add comments to other posts.

As well as explaining the process, the videos also highlight and celebrate the many people involved in every test. This was great for social media: focusing on the people in the lab, and why they were there, rather than just what they were doing was a great way to engage with our audience.

We decided to use video as it is a quick and descriptive way to explain what was happening. Video is particularly popular on social media, and with regard to something like the laboratory, where the general public are not usually allowed access, it allows the viewer to see and hear something they may not have ever been able to.

We have posted the first two videos onto our social media channels and we're also aiming to reach a wider audience by working with other NHS organisations, universities, health charities and local health organisations to share and promote the videos. If you would like to watch the videos yourself, just search #DiscoverPathology on Twitter. 

Claire Kennedy is Communications Lead at South West London Pathology and **Rachel Berkoff** is Communications Team Administrator at the Royal College of Pathologists.