



GET YOURSELF CONNECTED

Ian Davies and **Joanne Horne** look at the increasing role of social media in biomedical science.

Over the last 10 years, the way we communicate, access news, and share information online has changed almost beyond recognition. Far from being just a passive provider of information, the internet has seen a sharp increase in user-generated content from social media outlets – an organic and interconnected collection of discussions, views and comment.

By removing traditional hierarchies and democratising opportunities to express views, the rise in social media output offers both opportunities and threats to healthcare scientists in promoting and disseminating our work.

Social media includes websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, and to facilitate interaction and networking. From sharing comments, photographs and videos, to writing blogs and creating wikis, social media applications (such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) give us the direct opportunity to create content and discuss issues.

Networking

Social media provides opportunities to meet like-minded professionals, build networks, and facilitate education and learning. One of the most common complaints from biomedical scientists is that we are the invisible workforce, operating behind the scenes, whilst at least 70% of all medical diagnoses are based on laboratory test results.

Previously, we were reliant on publicising our profession and the importance of the work that we do at an organisational level, via educational institutions or through local STEM events. However, the evolution of social media has moved the goalposts because promotion of our profession is now a responsibility for us all, with the opportunity to inform our social media followers of our essential roles within

healthcare, education, leadership, management and research.

Many professionals in senior positions within stakeholder organisations have Twitter accounts that they use to promote their roles and engage with healthcare professionals. Not only does this create engagement by increasing understanding of the work they do, but it also provides direct accessibility and discussion, which is open to all who view their account. This often provides a forum for debate, which in turn encourages further networking and opportunities.

Similarly, the NHS England Twitter account (@NHS) is curated by a different person each week, from a wide range of professional backgrounds (and, importantly, also patients and carers). With over 25,000 followers, the stories and experiences shared provide an illuminating insight into the breadth of NHS services and allow us to engage in discussion and debate with colleagues across healthcare.

Social media promotes professional connectivity because it removes

IBMS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The IBMS has an active social media presence that promotes the work of the Institute and its members, for example reporting upon biomedical news items, engaging with members' activities, or distributing important professional information.

Its main social media outlets are Twitter (@IBMScience), which includes regular updates and campaigns together with weekly motivational hashtags and video of the week features; Facebook (/biomedicalscience), which engages member discussion through science articles, competitions, case studies and laboratory humour; and LinkedIn, which focuses upon careers and professional networking.



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traditional geographical barriers, on a local, national and international scale. It can provide a mechanism of support, encouragement and inspiration, with sharing and development of ideas and innovations. It can also be morale boosting to know that there are others facing the same issues as you.

Education and development

By facilitating networking with similar professionals from around the world, scientific debate is no longer restricted to local or national discussion. Prominent pathologists and scientists often post links to interesting articles, and difficult or rare case studies, with discussion and debate around the potential differential diagnoses. Senior leaders and educationalists post links to teaching materials, conferences and courses, and policy documents.

Professionals studying for the same qualification may form groups on sites (such as WhatsApp, Facebook or LinkedIn) to provide a forum for support and discussion of the subject. The use of twitter hashtags relating to scientific conferences, e.g. #IBMSCongress, encourages sharing of social and scientific content, for example – key themes from the event. This can be

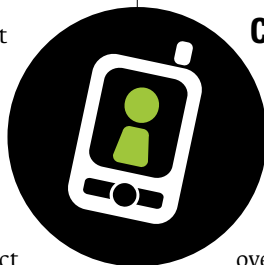
especially useful for colleagues who are unable to attend, as it facilitates wider learning and engagement. Organisational social media accounts also promote awards within healthcare, for which biomedical scientists can be nominated. What better way to promote our profession than to nominate our colleagues for the amazing work they do?

Professional conduct

While the benefits of social media are evident, this does not come without potential regulatory, reputational and, ultimately, personal risk. High-profile cases surrounding online stalking, confidentiality breaches and “fake news” highlight the need for professionalism and judgement when utilising social media for personal and professional use. As with any form of communication, as HCPC registrants, we have a professional duty to use social media responsibly and to protect both service users and public confidence in our profession. To provide guidance to registrants, the HCPC has recently



provided advice on social media use, which recognises the benefits but also provides clear and useful advice on how to ensure registrants adhere to the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. Their guidance (see box, below) ensures that communication is appropriate, registrants are honest and trustworthy, confidentiality is respected and appropriate professional boundaries are maintained.




Conclusions

The power and impact of social media can be demonstrated by the inaugural Biomedical Science Day on 19 July last year. During the day IBMS social media posts were seen by over 166,000 people, with over 800 visits to a dedicated webpage and high-profile support from other professional bodies. Added together with

Healthcare Science week in March, National Pathology Week in November, and a wide range of other local and national campaigns, the opportunities for us all to promote our work are huge.

From building multi-professional networks and connecting with colleagues internationally, to promoting our work and highlighting our role in the patient journey, social media provides a fantastic tool for biomedical scientists. Although not without risk, used professionally and responsibly, your voice can be amplified and your opinion heard.

So, get connected and continue this conversation online today using the Twitter hashtag #BMSsocialmedia 

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HCPC TOP TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Think before you post

Social media posts can reach a large audience and, once posted, can be difficult to delete. Before posting, either personally or in a professional capacity, think about the message you are sending and how it reflects upon you as a registered biomedical scientist.

Think who can see what you share

Keep a check on your privacy settings, especially after software updates. Think about who can see what you post and remember that your privacy settings cannot guarantee that

something you post will not become publicly visible (e.g. if shared by someone else).

Maintain appropriate professional boundaries

Think about how you communicate with colleagues, service users or carers. It is easy for the boundaries between professional and personal to be blurred, so always be mindful of maintaining appropriate professional relationships online.

Do not post information which could identify service users without their consent

This could include locations or photographs with identifying information, or posts that provide sufficient detail for a service user to be identified.

Do not post inappropriate or offensive material

Use your professional judgement in deciding whether to post or share content. As well as obviously offensive material, think how any content reflects upon you as a healthcare professional.

Follow your employers social media policy

Most employees will be bound

by social media guidance from their employers, so check carefully what is acceptable.

When in doubt, get advice

If you think something might be inappropriate, don't risk posting it. If you are unsure or concerned then seek advice from line managers, employers or professional bodies.

Keep posting

Social media provides great opportunities to educate, connect and network. Keep posting and developing content whilst being mindful of professional requirements.