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An assessment of social media usage by dermatology residency programs

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Abstract

Despite the increasing popularity of social media, the activity of dermatology residency programs on top social media platforms has never been investigated to our knowledge. We investigated a total of 126 dermatology residency programs to assess their presence and popularity on social media. Searches were conducted to identify dermatology residency departments' accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The number of Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers were recorded. Of the 126 dermatology residency programs, 29 (23%) were active on Facebook, 14 (11%) on Twitter, and 9 (7%) on Instagram. There was a wide range in the number of Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers. The top ten dermatology residency programs with the highest Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers were charted. Our results demonstrate the sparse usage of social media by dermatology residency programs. Although social media continues to increase in prevalence, dermatology residency programs are underutilizing these valuable resources.

Keywords: dermatology, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, dermatology residency programs

Introduction

Social media facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms

of expression via virtual communities and networks. According to Statista, there were 2.46 billion social media users in 2017 and a predicted three billion users in 2021, just three years from now [1]. Currently, Facebook has 2.23 billion monthly active users with Twitter and Instagram trailing behind at 335 million and one billion respectively [2-4]. Additionally, according to the Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults, the median American uses at least 3 of 8 social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and LinkedIn) with 90% of Twitter users and 91% of Instagram users also using Facebook [5]. Lastly, roughly 51% of Facebook users, 38% Instagram users, and 26% of Twitter users visit each site several times a day [5]. Thus, it is evident that social media has penetrated our society, is an ingrained habitual activity, and continues to consume our attention.

Social media platforms that feature visual content through pictures and videos have been utilized to demonstrate dermatological procedures performed by dermatologists. Most notably, Dr. Sandra Lee (aka Dr. Pimple Popper), a board certified dermatologist that specializes in general and cosmetic dermatology in Southern California, has become a global social media sensation with over 2 million followers on Instagram and over 4.2 million subscribers on YouTube where her videos have been



Figure 1. University of South Florida Dermatology Facebook.

viewed over 750 million times. Because of her large social media following, she now has a successful skincare line (SLMD-SandraLeeMD) and television show (Dr. Pimple Popper) on TLC.

Although the focus of most dermatology residency programs is not to create a skincare line or television show, there are still multiple benefits to engaging social media followers. Residency applicants are routinely gathering information about residency programs through electronic resources such as departmental websites, the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS), and the Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database (FREIDA). In addition to these online resources, applicants have begun exploring social media sites as another source of potential information about residency programs. In fact, McHugh et al. anonymously surveyed anesthesiology residency program interviewees at the University of Pittsburgh and found that applicants who accessed their program's Facebook page reported that it made them more likely to apply, interview, and increase the position of the program on their rank order lists [6]. Thus, a dermatology residency program's participation in

social media would likely be seen favorably by applicants. A social media presence could also allow applicants to gain insight into the uniqueness and individuality of each dermatology program. Other benefits to social networking include free public service announcements, community engagement, fundraising opportunities, recruitment of new staff, donations, dissemination of education to the public, and generating discussion.

Social media usage by dermatology residency departments has never been explored. Our study aims to examine the usage of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram by dermatology residency programs.

Methods

We examined dermatology residency programs for their presence on social media. The full list of 126 participating dermatology programs in the 2019 United States Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) residency cycle was obtained from ERAS. Then, we used Google to individually search for the official dermatology

Table 1. Dermatology programs with the greatest social media following.

Top ten programs with the most Facebook likes		Top ten programs with the most Twitter followers		Programs with Instagram & # of followers	
1.	University of South Florida Morsani: 2,353	1.	Duke University: 700	1.	New York Presbyterian Hospital (Columbia Campus): 113
2.	Tulane University: 1,542	2.	University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences: 539	2.	University of Utah: 69
3.	Boston University Medical Center: 791	3.	Case Western Reserve University/ University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center: 296	3.	Yale-New Haven Medical Center: 50
4.	Oregon Health & Science University: 613	4.	New York Presbyterian Hospital (Columbia Campus): 286	4.	University of Pennsylvania Health System Program: 49
5.	Larkin Community Hospital: 393	5.	University of Minnesota: 104	5.	Brown University: 27
6.	University of Florida: 375	6.	University of Pittsburgh Medical Center: 76	6.	New York University School of Medicine Program: 27
7.	Duke University: 338	7.	University of Utah: 72	7.	University of Massachusetts: 22
8.	University of Utah: 318	8.	Temple University Hospital: 57	8.	University of California (Irvine): 10
9.	University of Mississippi School of Medicine: 314	9.	Yale-New Haven Medical Center: 41	9.	University of Pittsburgh Medical Center: 6
10.	Case Western Reserve University/ University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center: 299	10.	Washington University/ B-JH/ SLCH Consortium: 38		

department website and assessed their social media icon links to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Next, we individually searched each dermatology program on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram sites using their respective search features. We used all combinations of full and abbreviated/lay program names in our search. For example, the University of South Florida Morsani Program was found by searching combinations of the following until an account was found: “University of South Florida”, “USF”, “Morsani” + “dermatology” and “derm.” We subsequently used Google to search every dermatology program name plus Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. When accounts were found, we checked the page to ensure that the content was consistent with dermatology department postings and did not belong to a non-resident or individual resident. The number of Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers were recorded in an Excel sheet. Data was collected by author KS on August 30, 2018. A second author, HR, confirmed the methods and results on September 3, 2018.

Results

Of 126 dermatology residency programs, we identified 29 (23%) active on Facebook, 14 (11%) on

Twitter, and, 9 (7%) on Instagram. A table of the top ten schools with the most Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers is shown below (**Table 1**). University of South Florida Morsani had the most Facebook likes: 2,353 (**Figure 1**), Duke University had the most Twitter followers: 700 (**Figure 2**), and New York Presbyterian Hospital (Columbia Campus) had the most Instagram followers: 113 (**Figure 3**). University of Utah was the only school present in the top ten schools for each category of social media. Only 5 programs (4%) had all three social media platforms. These schools were: New York Presbyterian Hospital (Columbia Campus), University of Utah, Yale, Brown University, and Pittsburgh (UPMC). Interestingly, the majority of the dermatology departments’ websites had social media icons that linked to the general medical college’s page. There were only 8 programs with a social media icon (either Facebook or Twitter) on their dermatology department website that linked directly to their dermatology-specific social media page. Additionally, through searching dermatology departments’ presence on social media, we came across multiple other medical specialties’ department and residency pages.

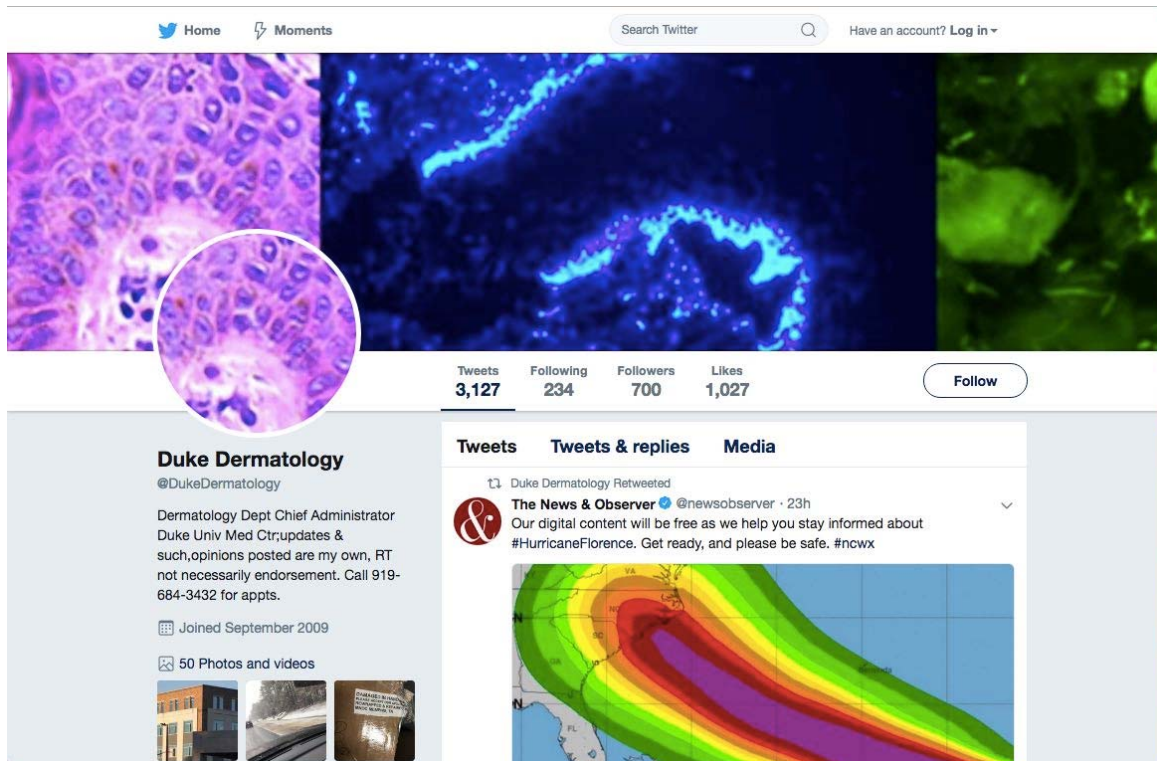


Figure 2. Duke Dermatology Twitter.

Discussion

Social media will continue to be a powerful tool of influence for medical providers. Specifically, within dermatology, there has been an increase in the use of social media by dermatology journals, professional dermatology-related organizations, and dermatological patient-centered organizations between 2012-2018 [7]. Our results demonstrate the scarce usage of social media by dermatology residency programs, a topic that has never been assessed. Amongst the top ten dermatology programs with the most Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram popularity, we found no significant trends in terms of location, school ranking, or National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding.

Perhaps one reason for dermatology programs' limited social media presence is that dermatology is one of the most competitive specialties to apply to for residency. According to the 2018 edition of the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) data, dermatology has the second lowest percentage (after interventional radiology) matched by preferred specialty and highest average step 1 and

step 2 scores [8]. Thus, dermatology departments might feel that they do not need to advertise their respective programs on social media as they already have an overflow of qualified applicants. Interestingly, a recent study by Chandawarker et al., found that 14 of 67 (21%) of integrated plastic surgery programs had active Instagram accounts with an exponential growth of programs adopting Instagram since August 2015 [9]. Additionally, through our search we noticed other competitive specialties such as otolaryngology and interventional radiology with greater social media presence than dermatology. Specifically, otolaryngology at the University of Chicago had a Facebook page with 1,825 likes, whereas a dermatology Facebook did not exist. Again, interventional radiology at the University of California San Francisco Program had 1,122 Twitter followers, whereas a dermatology Twitter page was not found. Thus, although competitive specialties might not need to attract residency applicants, their increasing social media presence suggests that there are additional benefits to interacting on online platforms.

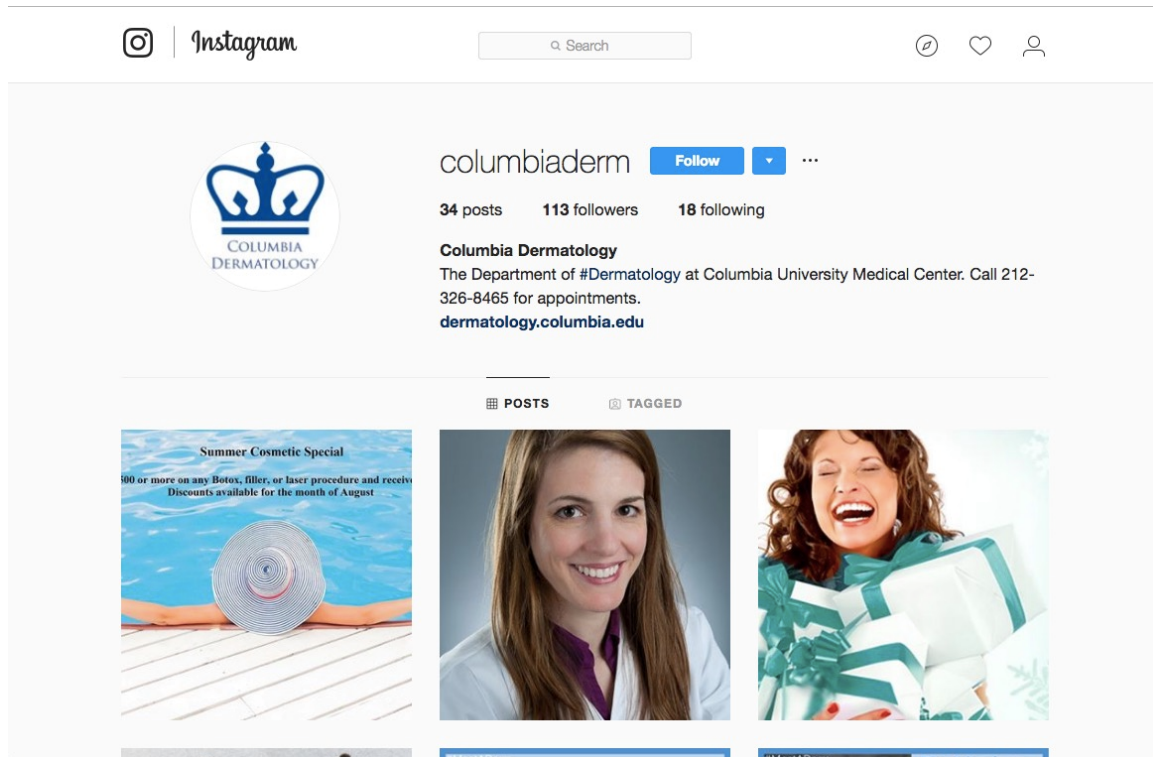


Figure 3. Columbia Dermatology Instagram.

Another reason why dermatology residencies may not desire a social media presence could be related to questions regarding professionalism and ethical guidelines. However, Chandawarker et al. established proposed guidelines (opportunities and pitfalls) for plastic surgery trainees that can be broadly applied to any individual resident or residency program [9]. Among several, some guidelines for enhancing opportunities and avoiding pitfalls in social media include: frequent posting to develop a strong following, engaging local and national mentors and other residency programs by following, liking, or commenting, utilizing promotional hashtags, obtaining consent of photography/videography in accordance with institutional policies, ensuring proper citation and avoidance of copyright infringement, and supervision of social media accounts by faculty [9].

Social media offers many benefits to training, education, patient quality improvement, and practice building, and can aid in communicating directly with patients in addition to cultivating a

memorable brand [10-14]. Additionally, a social media presence can help to connect dermatology program alumni, which will likely benefit current residents who may seek mentorship or assistance in obtaining a job. Overall, the benefits of social media platforms include but are not limited to: attracting residency applicants, creating a mentorship track, engaging the community for educational purposes, obtaining volunteers for clinical trials, recruiting new staff, and enhancing fundraising and donations. Thus, as our society becomes more digital, social media is a modern newsletter that is becoming crucial to reach the public.

Conclusion

Our data suggests sparse use of social media by dermatology residency programs. We encourage dermatology residency programs to consider expanding their social media presence in order to obtain its numerous benefits and keep pace with the forefront of societal trends.

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