

EDITORIAL

Social media wears a white coat now



Currently, around 72% of the public uses some form of social media, and greater than 90% of the world has a smartphone.¹ This figure includes those in the health care profession, including the specialty of oral pathology. We are beginning to see that social media is more comfortable wearing a white coat now. Oral pathologists (and other health care professionals) are adeptly using social media as an effective form of teaching, learning, and even consulting. For example, lectures detailing recent changes to the World Health Organization's head and neck terminology for salivary glands are available online now. If you want to learn how to configure a smartphone to a microscope adapter for affordable, high-quality photomicrographs, you can find that on social media, too.

Yes, being on social media tends to waste time but, rather increasingly, social media is serving as an invaluable educational resource with the potential for even more effective applications. In February 2015, 24 pathologists coordinated a social media event at the United States and Canadian Academy of Pathology (USCAP) annual meeting. These pathologists “live-tweeted” the conference—that is, they provided real-time updates on what was going on during the conference. Greater than 5 million potential tweet views occurred for this event.² The updates allowed nonattendees to indirectly experience the conference as it was unfolding. But what was notable for the USCAP 2015 conference was the impact of social media even for a tweet that had to do with the evolution of terminology for thyroid cancer. Pathologists worldwide took note, but so did *The New York Times*, which reported on the social media story.³

In the 1980s, Dr. Ronald Weinstein, a pathologist, envisioned the practice of pathology that involved viewing an image indirectly on a television screen. Telepathology, he editorialized, would enhance the usefulness of the pathologist in a telehealth network.⁴ As technology improved, telepathology evolved and became less reliant on television. Decades later, the Editor-in-Chief of *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, and Oral Radiology*, Dr. Mark Lingen, introduced the Virtual Microscope (VM) to the readers of the journal. VM effectively allows remote reading of digital histopathologic slides.⁵ Smartphones can also share and transmit digital images, but more saliently, smartphones can disseminate immediate reactions from a network of connected individuals. In an instant, the smartphone group text becomes a virtual multiheaded microscope session.

More frequently, health care professionals are being less vigilant on social media about keeping their professional

identities separate from their personal identities. Arguably, this blurring of lines between professional and personal on social media has created a valuable ecosystem of pathologists. Diverse pathologists at different stages of their careers sharing their unique experiences have created a larger, collective experience of pathology that functions, for some, as a proxy for mentorship. Experiences that may not lend themselves to casual conversation at conferences are being discussed on social media. For instance, our anxiety over career advancement, indifference resulting from burnout, self-doubt caused by impostor syndrome, and institutional frustration with colleagues are all common to the lexicon of what we understand to be challenges in a professional career. Thus, a junior pathologist trying to navigate a career path has, on social media, a multitude of voices to help inform choices that fit his or her own unique experience.

Pathology, by nature, is a social profession. From the beginning of residency, pathologists learn about the “collective brain” of pathology and rely on it to discuss and diagnose challenging cases. These networks of co-residents, fellows, and faculty working together can serve as sources of reassurance for trainees. Yet such networks have traditionally been confined within the walls of institutions. Social media is proving to be a digital wrecking ball that is smashing down these walls. In the ruins, savvy pathologists have begun to create a vibrant new virtual, global institution with enormous potential benefits for our profession.

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