

## Medical dermatologists on social media: a call to action



*To the Editor:* We read with great interest the article by Siervo et al<sup>1</sup> describing the presence of dermatologists in social media. The benefits of a medical presence on social media platforms such as Instagram have been described previously.<sup>2</sup> Particularly for visual specialties such as dermatology, social media may be used for education, for advocacy, and for patients to share their experiences.

The authors' article,<sup>1</sup> however, brings to prominence the disproportionate online presence of cosmetic dermatology compared with medical dermatology, with 83% of the top 10 dermatology influencers across Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter in 2019 producing cosmetic content. This is but one process shaping public perception that dermatologists spend the majority of their time performing cosmetic procedures or treating conditions with modest morbidity.<sup>3</sup> Popular television programs such as *The Big Bang Theory*, *Scrubs*, *Seinfeld*, and *Grey's Anatomy* also perpetuate stereotypes of dermatologists as "cyst-popping physicians."<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with existing data indicating that 63% of a dermatologist's patient care hours are spent on managing medical dermatology conditions; 27% on performing surgery.<sup>5</sup> Only 10% of direct patient care hours are spent on cosmetic dermatology.<sup>5</sup>

To dispel some of the misconceptions regarding our specialty, we propose that more dermatologists engage with social media platforms. Because dermatology is one of the medical specialties with the greatest number of diseases and broadest scope of clinical practice, there is an abundance of content to draw on. Examples of content may include clinical, dermoscopic, or histologic images of classic presentations, interesting cases, or clinical pearls. Dermatologists could also provide commentary on medical literature and share recent advances in academia. This would not only provide a more accurate portrayal of the role of the dermatologist but also may improve regard for our specialty.

Social media may also serve as a teaching tool. Existing online learning platforms include the *New England Journal of Medicine's* Image Challenge, but the highly visual nature of dermatology means it can be seamlessly integrated into social media

for further educational application. It is widely known that medical students do not receive adequate exposure to dermatology, and the dissemination of educational content through social media has great potential for educating future physicians.

Given that Instagram alone has in excess of 500 million active daily users, social media are also ideal for patient advocacy. Social media can be used by both organizations and individual clinicians to increase public awareness of rare dermatoses and life-threatening dermatologic conditions, and counter some of the deficits in traditional teaching such as the underrepresentation of dermatoses in ethnically diverse skin.

Finally, individual clinicians may take advantage of social media platforms to develop an online presence. As technology becomes increasingly intertwined in our lives, patients are increasingly seeking out information about their treating physicians.<sup>2</sup> Proactively creating a social media page enables the physician to curate the information patients have access to. Physicians may easily state their area of expertise, and their online presence may serve as a means of cultivating a larger referral base.

*Helen Y. Sun, BMed, and Deshan Frank Sebaratnam, FACD*

*From the Department of Dermatology, Liverpool Hospital, and Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales, New South Wales, Australia.*

*Funding sources: None.*

*Conflicts of interest: None disclosed.*

*IRB approval status: Not applicable.*

*Reprints not available from the authors.*

*Correspondence to: Helen Y. Sun, BMed, Department of Dermatology, Liverpool Hospital, 45-47 Goulburn St, Liverpool, NSW 2170, Australia*

*E-mail: [helen.sun1@student.unsw.edu.au](mailto:helen.sun1@student.unsw.edu.au)*

### REFERENCES

1. Siervo TJ, Young PM, Kassabian SK, Wu KK, Armstrong AW. Dermatologists in social media: a study on top influencers, posts, and user engagement. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2020;83(5):1452-1455.
2. Wong XL, Liu RC, Sebaratnam DF. Evolving role of Instagram in #medicine. *Intern Med J.* 2019;49:1329-1332.
3. Brezinski EA, Harskamp CT, Ledo L, Armstrong AW. Public perception of dermatologists and comparison with other

- medical specialties: results from a national survey. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2014;71:875-881.
4. Vatanchi M, Zelac DE. Sitcoms' scintillating skin surveyors. *Int J Womens Dermatol.* 2019;5:271.
  5. Kimball AB, Resneck JS Jr. The US dermatology workforce: a specialty remains in shortage. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2008;59:741-745.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2020.10.040>