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The Social Media Scrub-In

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Sir

Inevitably, social media play a role in all of our personal lives. One application that we did not anticipate when matriculating into medical school was leveraging Twitter and Snapchat as educational tools. Alas, it is 2017 and the millennials are coming. Hang one if by land and two if by sea, and while you are at it, post your most recent abdominoplasty on Instagram.

When done right, plastic surgery social media accounts create a personal dialogue with the patient, facilitate patient education, and allow plastic surgeons to showcase their work. Furthermore, these platforms are conducive to interaction between peers and colleagues in the field of plastic surgery. Much of this content and the pros and cons of social media were discussed in detail in Dr. Rohrich's editorial published earlier this year.¹

However, one overlooked advantage of plastic surgeons' presence on social media is the opportunity for medical student education. As medical students interested in plastic surgery, we are using social media as a learning tool. We are interacting with and learning from some of the best plastic surgeons in the world.

On Snapchat, students watch face lifts in Chicago, breast reconstructions in Los Angeles, abdominoplasties in Texas, and labiaplasties in Miami simultaneously from hundreds or thousands of miles away. We send messages to surgeons about different procedures and, to our delight, they are unanimously welcomed and responded to after the procedure—or even by the videographer during the operation! Many of the most active surgeons on Snapchat showcase their preoperative work and clinics, permitting us to gain an understanding of preparing for surgery and recovery/follow-up.

On Instagram, plastic surgeons post educational content for students in addition to before-and-after images to display their work and follow-up. These “transformation” images lend themselves particularly well to reconstructive education, as we see on our iPhones what can be accomplished in the operating room. As on Snapchat, some surgeons livestream their cases on Instagram Live. In real-time, we immerse ourselves from afar.

On Twitter, students have the opportunity to learn from journal clubs (i.e. #PRSJournalClub) and engage in discussions with plastic surgeons and plastic surgery residents by participating

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in threads marked #Plastic-Surgery. Maybe most importantly, it gives us insight into how surgeons think.

All this to say that social media are much more than a forum for keeping in touch with personal friends/colleagues; or even providing an interactive and easily accessible medium for patient communication/education. They have also become a great tool for student education. When used correctly with professionalism in mind, we benefit by observing procedures and engaging with world-renowned surgeons. Many students have limited access to the field of plastic surgery, and do not regularly have the opportunity to appreciate this vast and widely expansive field at their home institution. Social media platforms have become uniquely helpful for those of us who are new to the field. We encourage plastic surgeons from around the world to continue with, and perhaps expand on, their practice social media offerings. They are helpful in more ways than you know.

References

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