

Advantages and Disadvantages for Nurses of Using Social Media

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Jianlei Hao¹ and Bingbing Gao²

¹Biomedical Translational Research Institute, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

²School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia

Abstract

Nowadays, modern electronic technologies have become a ubiquitous part of all people's life with the features of fast and remote, and fundamentally changing the way people access and share information. Social media is a powerful tool to connect among individuals. People now are adept at using this medium, by which they can stay connected and make their jobs efficient and innovative. It provides entirely new concept and can hardly be imagined by people in 20 years ago. Likewise, healthcare professionals are also embracing social media as a fantastic tool to advance their careers. As an essential part of health practitioner, registered nurses also use social media for either personal or vocational reasons. However, they should always follow the National laws and never breach the health practitioners' policies and guidelines. This essay outlines a background of social media, the advantages and disadvantages of using social media in the healthcare system and the responsibilities as a new registered nurse in using this medium will also be discussed.

Social media is generally defined as powerful 'Internet-based' tools that allow users to share, create, and discuss the online content such as information, opinions, personal experiences, images and video clips [1-3]. Social media is a collective term which provides various features that can meet the different needs of the users. It contains social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, blogs, media sharing (Youtube), video or photo sharing sites, microblogs (Twitter) and collaborative projects (Wikipedia) [1,4]. The public participation rate in social media has increased unexpectedly over this decade. Sensis Social Media Report (2016) states that close to nine in ten Australians (87%) access Internet every day. Among these users, 69% of them sent or shared photo or links by using social networking website such as Facebook and Twitter daily (Sensis Social Media Report 2016) [5].

Social media benefits the whole healthcare system in a variety of ways. It provides healthcare professionals with applications to share health information, debate health practice issues, communicate with the public and promote the primary health care behaviors [4,6]. Social media can be a useful tool for collaboration. It provides opportunities for healthcare practitioners to dialogue with their colleagues and peers and keep pace with the latest healthcare developments even they were separated by a long distance [2]. For example, it can connect healthcare practitioners in third-world countries specialists from advanced locations, and they can stream the surgical procedures and ask questions via the Internet [4]. Nurses can also participate in online forums, pose questions, and discuss patients' health issues with peers who have similar interests [4,7]. They can exchange ideas about treatment options with a broad range of communities, and acquire the latest information of clinical knowledge in this supportive environment as a result [7]. Therefore, social media establishes a new communication method for the health professionals, and they can share and exchange health information in an entirely new way which cannot be possible before.

Another advantage of social media is it can be an agent of providing clinical education to healthcare professionals. The efficient communication abilities provided by this medium can be used to deliver professional training [2,4]. For example, in Australia, according to Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) (2016a)[8], registered nurses are required to gain 20 continuous professional development points annually to maintain their registration. Nurses who work in rural areas can use social media websites to access to online courses to ensure their registration are up to date in spite of significant geographical distance [9]. Social media platforms also have influences on nursing educational experience [4]. Ventola (2014) estimates that over half nursing

*Corresponding Author: Jianlei Hao, Biomedical Translational Research Institute, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China, Email: haojianlei@jnu.edu.cn

schools are now using social media in educating students. In one example, tutors use media sharing websites like YouTube in the class to illustrate a concept or to stimulate students to discuss. Students watch the video and respond to activities that eventually improve their clinical practice [4].

Nurses can also use social media to connect their patients and provide them healthcare education. Nowadays, social media can help patients easier to acquire healthcare information and other useful medical resources. Patients can participate in virtual seminars, receive healthcare support, and track their personal physical progress through the social media [4]. As the main connector between the patients and the healthcare system, nurses always have the responsibilities to provide accurate health information to educate patients or their families to promote their health (NMBA 2016). For example, nurses can create specific disease discussion forums for multiple patients with similar conditions. Through these forums, nurses can provide efficient communication and evidence-based information to enhance patients overall health condition; patients are also offered an opportunity to join into the discussion and they can share their own experiences to the others [2,4]. The use of Facebook for medical reminders is another example of social media in patient education. Patients can receive alerts and reminders from nurses through private messages via Facebook [2]. Healthcare information can be delivered efficiently to a broad community and eventually increase medicine compliance and reduce hospital re-admissions.

However, although social media has these distinct advantages to obtaining useful information only a click way, it also has disadvantages as well. Low quality or lack of reliability of online health information has been found to be a major limitation of social media in health care [4,6]. Social media offers the public a wide range of health information. A vast majority of people search online healthcare information via online sources to diagnose themselves or the others [3]. However, some authors of the information are usually anonymous. Additionally, the information may be incomplete, informal or not referenced, and this makes people hard to identify the reliability of the information [4,6]. What is more, Househ, Borycki & Kushniruk (2014) [10], find out that some authors even magnify the health information outcomes to gain more 'click volume'. Therefore, people who were seeking health information may be misled by the inaccurate information and cause potential harm to their health.

Violation of confidentiality and privacy of the patient is another significant disadvantage of using social media in the healthcare setting. The violation can be either intentional or inadvertent and can happen in many different ways [4,11]. Some nurses may breach patients' privacy with the information they posted on social media sites, for example, post photos or videos of a patient without any valid consent, comment patients in a degrading manner, and expose too many patients' details makes them be identified [4,12]. However, patients' privacy entails their rights and expectation that they need to be treated with basic dignity [12]. Once their privacy is being violated, even inadvertent, can make patients feel lose their dignity and destroy the therapeutic relationship between nurses and patients [4,11]. What is worse, these inappropriate actions may also damage the nurses' professional image and ruin the reputation of the health care settings as well [4,13]. Moreover, nurses might face potential consequences such as penalties, termination of the job,

or temporary or permanent loss their registration (Ventola 2014) [4]. Some people misunderstand that the inappropriate content once deleted from the social media site is no longer exist [13]. However, the moment patient's information or photo is posted, it lives on the server permanently and could be retrieved by law even deletion [13].

Another negative effect of using social media on health care practice is distractions and interruptions during the working time [14]. Nurses are in a complicated atmosphere which is vulnerable to distraction by social media (Brady, Malone & Fleming 2009). Many studies found out that modern technology such as mobile phones could be a potential factor in making distractions or interruptions among nurses while they are providing care to patients [14,15]. pointed out that a nurse who is disturbed by social networking messages may introduce errors in medication calculation and administration and cause severe damage to patients or even death.

Misusing of social media can lead to long-lasting implications. Health practitioners include registered nurses are responsible for adhering to the professional standards of the code of professional conduct when they use social medias (AHPRA 2014). They must always ensure that all patients' information needs to be kept confidential and can only be used by professional reason (NMBA 2008a) [16]. However, many nurses never realized that what they had posted could be considered as a breach of patient's privacy. According to Tuckett and Turner (2016) [17], nearly 30 percent (28%) nurses revealed that they were not aware of any policies or standards of utilizing social media in their scope of practice; this also happens to the beginning registered nurses who are not familiar with the existing practice standards in utilizing social media corresponding to their professions either [17,18]. They might breach the profession regulations inadvertently and cause potentially harm to customers, and also influenced their entire nursing profession. Therefore, it is essential that all registered nurses include newly graduate nurses to aware their obligations and responsibilities under the National law and professional conduct while using social media [1,4,11]. They should always aware that all their activities on the social media websites are considered as public activities. The contents they post not only directly reflect the entire nurses' professionalism and also have the ability to influence the public opinion of nurses [11,12]. Registered nurses also have the responsibilities to advocate for their patients and report any identified violation of patient's privacy (NMBA 2008b) [19]. Last but not the least, it is also significant to nurses to aware the severe consequence of posting inappropriately on the social media. AHPRA released the social media policy for all registered health practitioners in March 2014. Likewise, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) also published the online networking guidelines for the nurses. These guidelines help nurses, as well as beginning registered nurses and nursing students to understand their professional responsibilities to adhere to the legal and ethical standards while using social media. The basic premise of these guidelines needs to apply to the Code of professional conduct, which expects nurses to sustain the "professional domains in order to ensure the 'good standing' of the nursing profession" (NMBA 2008a) [16]. Anyone who fails to do so might receive a verbal or written warning which issues by the AHPRA, or even suspend or disqualify the registration [13].

To conclude, social media opens the door of information to both healthcare practitioners and patients and has potentially changed the ways of communication. When used cautiously, social media can provide the obvious advantages such as professional networking, clinical education, and patients' health promotion. However, when used unwisely, social media has its disadvantages such as violation of patients' confidentiality and privacy and can lead to formidable consequences. Therefore, it is essential to nurses, especially the beginning registered nurses to familiarize themselves with guidelines, national laws and policies which govern the social media use.

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