



# Thoughts on Social Media in Hematology-Oncology

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides insights into the current state of social media in the field of hematology-oncology. It highlights the increasing role of platforms like Twitter and Facebook in facilitating information sharing, patient support, and professional collaboration. The article emphasizes the challenges of maintaining accurate reliable content amidst the abundance of information. Additionally, it discusses the potential benefits of social media and fostering patient engagement, clinical trial recruitment, and knowledge dissemination among healthcare professionals and patients.

A social media platform is a web-based application facilitating interactive creation and sharing of information and ideas, through virtual communities. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and podcast-hosting applications are among the most popular and established electronic communication tools and social media platforms. Prior generations of physicians were apprehensive about engaging on social media out of concern about patient privacy, liability, compensation, and familiarity with the technology; however, a 2011 survey of 4033 clinicians, found that 90% of clinicians used at least one social media site for personal use and that 65% of clinicians already used at least one platform for professional purposes [1]. In this essay, we will explore the role of social media in hematology-oncology, the benefits and challenges associated with this approach.

In the hematology-oncology field, social media platforms have been used to share information about new treatment options, clinical trials, patient support groups and emerging research findings which is a much-needed feature in a fast pace evolving field [2]. This has become a platform to discuss new research findings, emerging treatments and comment on current events or critically appraise evidence. Using a specific hashtag to discuss a topic, have become a popular way for professionals to connect with one another, discuss cases, collaborate on projects, and even discuss potential job offers [3].

These platforms can be powerful tools in patient education, allowing healthcare professionals to share information about cancer prevention, screening, and treatment [4]. Social media collaborations can foster a sense of community and an opportunity for providers to learn from one another. The most common example to date, is the use of a specific hashtag during a conference that allows users to interact about one specific topic [5]. Another example is how social media can be adopted to very specific

areas such as types of cancers. There is literature published describing the association and impact of social media with skin cancer, gynecologic oncology, cardio-oncology, and prostate cancer [6-9].

Despite the potential benefits of using social media for evidence-based hematology-oncology, there are also several challenges associated with it. One of the primary limitations is ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the information that is being shared. Validity is important, as these media platforms can also be a breeding ground for misinformation and false claims [4]. This has become relevant, as patients have access to these means and may be vulnerable to false information and exposed to inaccurate expectations of miraculous treatments, cures or unproven therapies [10]. To address this challenge, it is important for healthcare professionals to carefully vet the information they share on social media and to rely on trusted sources of evidence-based medicine.

On the other hand, there is potential for information overload. With so much information available on social media, it can be difficult for healthcare professionals to keep up with the latest research findings and treatment options. For the field of hematology-oncology there are more than 15 different channels and associated podcasts with weekly episodes for example. This can be overwhelming and may make it more difficult for providers to feel that the clinical decision made is the most up to date.

The future directions of social media use in oncology, both for patients and clinicians, are likely to evolve significantly, influenced by technological advancements, regulatory changes, and shifts in communication practices. Social media platforms will increasingly serve as hubs for peer support, allowing patients to connect with others who have similar diagnoses or treatment experiences. This can offer emotional support, share practical advice, and build a sense of community. Social media will provide a wealth of real-time data on patient experiences, treatment outcomes, and public perceptions. This can be invaluable for research, helping to identify trends, track patient-reported outcomes, and understand the impact of interventions. Social media will be increasingly used for recruiting participants for clinical trials, as it allows researchers to reach a broad audience and target specific patient populations more effectively. Collaborations between healthcare organizations and social media platforms to create fact-checking initiatives and promote reliable information sources will be crucial.

Overall, the future of social media in oncology holds promise for enhancing patient care, improving communication, and advancing research. However, it will require careful management of privacy, data security, and the accuracy of information to ensure its benefits are maximized while mitigating potential risks.

In conclusion, these platforms can be used to spread information, facilitate discussion and collaboration among healthcare professionals, and provide a means of communicating with patients. However, there are also several challenges associated with this approach, including the potential for misinformation and information overload, that until this day, has no signs of slowing down.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All authors indicate no relevant conflict of interest that could affect the writing of this manuscript.

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