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Social Media Utilization Among Pharmacy Preceptors

Brett Feret

University of Rhode Island, bferet@uri.edu

Stephanie Romano

University of Rhode Island

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Title: Social Media Utilization Among Pharmacy Preceptors

Abstract

Objectives: To evaluate pharmacy preceptor's current use of social media and the interest of using social media as a communication tool.

Methods: The Office of Experiential Education (OEE) dispersed an anonymous 28-question electronic survey to all affiliated preceptors (N=1032). The survey was designed to evaluate the frequency and extent to which the College's preceptors utilize social media for personal and professional purposes, as well as their interest in using social media as a communication platform with the OEE.

Results: The overall response rate for the survey was 21% (N=217). Seventy-seven percent of preceptors use at least one form of social media with the majority stating they use it for personal purposes (76.3%). Professional usage was reported at 32.3% and only 28.9% of preceptors reported at least some interest in receiving OEE updates through social media.

Conclusions: The use of social media is continually expanding both in its number of users and types of social media accounts offered. Social media can be used as a tool to facilitate communication and networking, both on a personal and professional level.

Although new technologies are available and communication via social media can be instantaneous and readily accessible, the majority of the preceptors affiliated with the College of Pharmacy were not interested in receiving important updates such as announcements and scheduling reminders from the OEE through social media platforms.

Experiential programs should not consider social media utilization a priority for communication to preceptors.

Keywords

social media; experiential education; preceptor

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Introduction:

The use of social media is continually expanding both in its number of users and types of social media accounts offered. There will be an estimated 2.13 billion active social media users worldwide by the end of 2016¹. The social media scene has been dominated by Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Instagram, each owing their popularity to their 1,490 million, 316 million, 300 million, and 300 million accounts, respectively². Social media can be used as a tool to facilitate communication and networking, both on a personal and professional level. Pharmacy organizations such as the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) have created social media profiles and the information conveyed across these sites ranges from announcements, short videos, pictures, and breaking news. The majority of College and University websites now utilize social media as an avenue for communication as well. Social media can be used for both student recruitment and alumni engagement, and has been used in the classroom as well as a tool to facilitate active learning.^{3,4} A recent survey in graduating pharmacy students showed that 93% of students had a social media profile and students accessed their social media accounts on an average of 35.6 minutes per day.⁵

Traditionally, colleges and schools of pharmacy have reached out to their pharmacy preceptors through e-mail, but the changing environment of instantaneous communication has raised the question to whether social media should be used as well. A survey in 2011 by Kukreja et al showed 60% of preceptors at Purdue University College of Pharmacy had a Facebook account and 9% had a Twitter account, but the authors concluded that the majority of pharmacy preceptors were not willing to use social

media in professional practice.⁶ Given the rapid increases and advances in social media, the objectives of this project was to define patterns of social media utilization amongst pharmacy preceptors and determine their interest in utilizing social media as a communication tool with the College of Pharmacy and Office of Experiential Education (OEE) at the University of Rhode Island.

Materials and Methods:

Survey items were developed by the investigators to assess pharmacy preceptors' utilization of social media for both professional and personal uses. A 28-question survey instrument was developed and contained questions to evaluate the frequency and extent of social media utilization for both personal and professional purposes. It also assessed the willingness to use social these social networking sites as a communication platform with the OEE of the University of Rhode Island. Demographic data was also collected, which included age, sex, primary area of practice, years in practice, and whether the individuals precepted advanced pharmacy practice experiences, introductory pharmacy practice experiences, or both. (Table 1)

An electronic invitation was sent to each preceptor affiliated with the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy. Active preceptors (N=1032) who had precepted students within the past 3 years were included in the invitation. The invitation briefly described the project and contained a hyperlink to the survey instrument and consent form. SurveyMonkey® online survey software was used to design and implement the survey. The participants had 14 days to complete the survey and a reminder e-mail was sent out at day 7. The University of University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board approved the project as an exempt review.

Results:

The survey was dispersed to 1032 preceptors affiliated with the University of Rhode Island through its experiential education software messaging center. The survey had a final response rate of 21% with 217 preceptors completing the survey. Sixty percent of respondents were women and 58% practiced in the community setting. Approximately half of the respondents precepted both IPPE and APPE experiences. Additional demographic data is shown in Table 1.

Overall 77.3% (N=163) of preceptors use some form of social media with Facebook being the most popular platform (82.9%). Table 2 shows the breakdown of the different platforms. Eighty-two percent of preceptors use their mobile devices to check their social media updates and 52.6% of preceptors often or always use their social media for personal purposes, primarily networking with friends and family. In comparison, 69.4% of preceptors rarely or never use their social media accounts for professional purposes. Activities stated for professional usage included networking with colleagues, news updates, and general communication. Only 16% mentioned continuing educational activities as part of their professional activities.

The 2nd portion of the survey assessed the preceptors' willingness to receive communication from the College's and also the College's OEE. Fifty-six percent of participants have little to no interest in receiving announcements or updates from the College of Pharmacy and only 26% had some or great interest in this. The results for communication with the OEE were similar in that 56% had little or no interest while 29%

had some or great interest. Communication from the OEE was defined as student placement announcements, reminder on evaluations, and general announcements. In addition 69% percent of participants said it is unlikely or extremely unlikely that they would use social media to reach out to assigned IPPE or APPE students. About 15% of preceptors initiated communication with students on social media after completion of the rotation, and off those participants, 25% reached out to students via Facebook, and 21.3% via LinkedIn. Fifty-one percent of preceptors said that past pharmacy students have reached out to them via social media after completion of a rotation via the same forms of social media.

Discussion:

The popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have given users the ability to communicate instantaneously through mobile devices. These platforms can be used to facilitate communication and networking both on a personal and professional level. Professional organizations and government agencies are utilizing these platforms for a variety of professional activities to keep users informed on up-to-date information. Despite these benefits, pharmacy preceptors affiliated with the University of Rhode Island, primarily use it for personal and not professional purpose, although 77% of respondents use some form of social media. The survey did not ascertain the reasons why a respondent did not use social media for professionalism purposes, but it can be hypothesized that the public nature of social media may jeopardize one's career and reputation if anything deemed unprofessional or inappropriate was posted on-line. LinkedIn which is considered a professional on-line network had reported usage of 54% in our survey, which may account for the majority of professional

usage reported by preceptors. Further investigation into specific platforms for professional and/or personal usage is warranted.

Respondents were also asked whether they had any interest in receiving social media updates from the College of Pharmacy along with the OEE. In line with the previous data, over half of preceptors had little or no interest in updates from the College. Sixty nine percent of preceptors said it would be unlikely or extremely unlikely that they would communicate with their assigned IPPE or APPE students via social media, yet more than half of preceptors stated that their students had reached out to them, primarily through Facebook and LinkedIn. These results continue to show that pharmacy preceptors want to use social media for personal purposes and they are content with standard e-mail and phone communications regarding experiential education curriculum and announcements, including interactions with students who are high utilizers of social media platforms.

Limitations to our study have been identified, specifically that this study utilized a survey based on face validity only. No formal validation process was conducted on the survey questions. In addition, while we had 217 responses, this was only a 21% response rate. The survey was only conducted at one specific college, even though it was sent out to affiliated preceptors throughout the New England and the Mid-Atlantic region. Selection bias may also have played a role in the results. Since the survey was voluntary, participants who completed the survey may have been more likely to be social media utilizers based on the title of the survey. Approximately 25% of preceptors are in the younger age quartile, and further investigation is needed to determine if there is a

correlation between age and likelihood to expand use of social media for personal as well as professional purposes.

Conclusions:

Although new technologies are available and communication via social media can be instantaneous and readily accessible, the majority of preceptors were not interested in receiving updates from either the College or OEE through social media platforms. Experiential programs may consider utilizing different social media platforms as a communication tool, but its impact and value to preceptors may be limited.

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