



Short Communication

Social media utilization among pharmacy preceptors

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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% ($N = 217$). Overall, 77% 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.

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Keywords: Social media; Experiential education; Preceptor

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 2016.¹ The social media scene has been dominated by Facebook[®] (<http://www.facebook.com>), Twitter[®] (<http://www.twitter.com>),

Google+[®] (<https://plus.google.com>), and Instagram[®] (<http://www.instagram.com>), each having mobile applications for all devices and owing their popularity to their 1.4 billion, 316 million, 300 million, and 300 million accounts, respectively.² 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 established a presence on social media. The information conveyed across these sites ranges from announcements, short videos, and pictures, to updates in practice and breaking news. 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

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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.⁶ 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. 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.

Methods

Survey items were developed by the investigators to assess pharmacy preceptor 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 were also collected, including age, sex, primary area of practice, years in practice, and if the individuals precepted advanced pharmacy practice experiences (APPE), introductory pharmacy practice experiences (IPPE), or both.

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 three 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 the end of the first week. The University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the project as exempt.

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. Overall, 60% of respondents were women and 58% practiced in the community setting. Approximately half of the respondents precepted both IPPE and APPE experiences. Full demographic data are 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. Overall, 82% 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 second portion of the survey assessed willingness to receive communication from the college and OEE. Overall, 56% 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

Table 1
Baseline characteristics ($N = 217$)

Sex (%)	
Female	59.8
Male	40.2
Age (%)	
18–24	0.5
25–34	24.5
35–44	26.4
45–54	21.2
55–64	24.5
> 65	2.8
Primary practice area (%)	
Community	47.9
Hospital	30.5
Ambulatory care	7.0
Long term care	2.8
Academia	4.2
Other	7.5
Years in practice (%)	
0–5	11.3
5–10	17.4
10–15	13.6
15–20	10.8
20–25	13.6
> 25	33.3
Advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) or introductory pharmacy practice experience (IPPE) precepting (%)	
IPPE	12.3
APPE	35.1
Both	52.6

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