



Short communication

# Student perceptions of a Self-Care course taught exclusively by team-based learning and utilizing Twitter

Kelly J. Wright, PharmD, BCACP<sup>\*</sup>, Tracy R. Frame, PharmD, BCACP,  
Melody L. Hartzler, PharmD, BCACP, AE-C

*School of Pharmacy, Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH 45314*

## Abstract

**Objective:** To assess student perceptions of the use of team-based learning (TBL) and Twitter in an Introduction to Self-Care course.

**Methods:** A total of 53 pharmacy students enrolled in an Introduction to Self-Care course were asked to complete a survey assessing their perceptions of teaching methods utilized in the course (i.e., TBL and the social media platform Twitter). The survey focused on student perceptions of teamwork, workload, and knowledge gained during the course, as well as the integration of Twitter into the course. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used to assess the students' responses. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results.

**Results:** Overall, 51 (96%) students completed the survey upon completion of the course. When asked if they agreed with the statement, "I prefer traditional lecture style classes over TBL," the median response was "somewhat disagree." The median response to the statement "this course prepared me to navigate the clinical decision making process" was "agree." The median response to the statement, "I enjoyed utilizing Twitter as a communication tool during this course" was "somewhat disagree." On average, students somewhat disagreed that Twitter was beneficial for their engagement in the class.

**Conclusions:** Overall, TBL and the course were viewed favorably. The survey revealed improvements that need to be made in the course, including increasing the course to three credit hours and reshaping the use of social media to better engage students in discussion beyond the classroom.

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## Introduction

The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards for Doctor of Pharmacy programs stress the incorporation of active learning into the pharmacy curricula for the purpose of developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.<sup>1</sup> The standards define active learning as "a style of teaching that requires the learner to formulate

answers to questions based on acquired knowledge while continuing to search for new knowledge that may provide better, more complete answers."<sup>1</sup> One formalized type of active learning that is gaining popularity in health professions education is team-based learning (TBL).<sup>2–4</sup> Standard Number 12, Professional Competencies and Outcome Expectations, describes competencies that must be achieved by PharmD graduates. It includes using "emerging technologies" and marketing to manage a patient-centered practice, promoting public health and wellness in cooperation with communities and providing drug information and counseling to patients and other health care professionals.<sup>1</sup> Given recent developments in communication technology and trends in medical

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author: Kelly J. Wright, PharmD, School of Pharmacy, Cedarville University, 251 N. Main St., Cedarville, OH 43212.

E-mail: [kellywright@cedarville.edu](mailto:kellywright@cedarville.edu); [kelly.hiteshew@gmail.com](mailto:kelly.hiteshew@gmail.com)

practice, the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) may be a great tool to facilitate achievement of these outcomes.<sup>5,6</sup> In light of the Standards and in order to encourage self-directed learning and engagement outside the classroom, TBL and Twitter were used to teach an Introduction to Self-Care course for first-year pharmacy students.

TBL was the chosen format for this course for many reasons. Though TBL originated in a business school, it has been readily adopted into many health profession curriculums.<sup>7,8</sup> It requires a low faculty-to-student ratio and has been associated with a variety of positive learning outcomes while stimulating more active learning in students than is done so by lectures.<sup>2,9,10</sup> In addition, health professions students' perceptions of TBL have been positive.<sup>11,12</sup> For example, when TBL was used to cover a historically "uninteresting" topic in a drug information course, the students' exam grades were better than previous years when the topic was taught by lecture, and 93% of the students surveyed agreed that TBL "was more effective than lecturing and increased their overall understanding of the material."<sup>13</sup> Another example of TBL in a pharmacy curriculum was its use in the workshop sessions of a six-course pathophysiology and therapeutics sequence. The authors found that, overall, students thought teamwork helped them better understand the course material.<sup>14</sup> Both of these studies utilized TBL as an add-on to a lecture-based course, not as the primary course teaching format.

Communication skills are some of the building blocks of a strong professional practice, and the development of communication skills is enhanced by the TBL process.<sup>15</sup> Social media can also be used as an effective form of communication, as it has become a primary route of disseminating and collecting information, and the medical community is seeking to determine how it can be embraced for the improvement of public health and patient interaction with providers.<sup>5,16</sup> One example of this is HelloHealth<sup>®</sup>, an electronic health record (EHR) with a practice model built around social media-type interactions.<sup>6</sup> Another example is a woman who blogs and Tweets about her diet and exercise routine in order to gain motivation to manage her diabetes and encourage others to do so as well.<sup>6</sup> Graduating pharmacists should be prepared to take advantage of social media to improve their practices.<sup>5</sup>

When using social media to interact with the medical community and the public, it is very important that pharmacists present themselves well. Maintaining professional attitudes and behaviors online is called "e-professionalism."<sup>17,18</sup> Although the majority of pharmacy students (as well as faculty and preceptors) are already using social media for personal reasons,<sup>19,20</sup> students may not realize the importance of e-professionalism.<sup>21,22</sup> Implementing social media into a course provides faculty with a platform to teach students about e-professionalism standards and expectations and the potential consequences of online discretions; as well as to model e-professionalism.<sup>23</sup>

Twitter, a popular social media application used by some health education courses to spread current information and

spark discussion,<sup>24</sup> was chosen to be used in this course to facilitate student engagement, prepare students for current trends in medical practice, and encourage e-professionalism. Twitter is designed to spark commentary and discussion, and it can be used to direct people to longer articles and videos, rather than act as a personal diary. It may be an ideal social media tool for the classroom.<sup>24</sup> Twitter has been incorporated into classrooms to allow quick access to communication; to make class discussions available to guest speakers, preceptors, and the public; and to build community among students.<sup>25</sup> Given the abundance of inaccurate and unverified information available on the web, health professions students must learn to identify credible, scientific information. Forgie et al.<sup>24</sup> suggest that Twitter may be used to direct students to credible online information via Tweeted links. They also suggest that Tweeting links to "real-life" stories from the media that address issues or topics relevant to the course in order to engage the students on a practical level.

Although specific studies that utilize a social media platform such as Twitter or Facebook have not been evaluated previously in the context of team-based learning, Junco et al.<sup>26</sup> studied the use of Twitter in a pre-health professional majors course. Students were given basic training on the use of Twitter, and then it was used for continuity in class discussions, student questions, book discussions, class reminders, and campus event reminders throughout the semester. The faculty also provided academic and personal support by posting information about academic-enrichment opportunities on campus. Students also used Twitter to organize service learning projects and study groups. Results showed the Twitter protocol improved contact between students and the faculty, encouraged cooperation among students, promoted active learning, and allowed prompt feedback.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the information described above, the instructors determined that TBL would best facilitate active learning in this course, and that Twitter was the most appropriate social media outlet to allow students to engage in discussion in and out of the classroom. The objective of this study was to assess student perceptions of the use of TBL and Twitter in an Introduction to Self-Care course.

## Methods

The Introduction to Self-Care course is the only formal self-care course in the curriculum at this institution, but self-care topics are intentionally re-emphasized in the second- and third-year therapeutic modules. The objective of the course is for students to understand the self-care process and to demonstrate appropriate clinical judgement in the selection and use of over-the-counter medications and products. Most of the required reading for the course is from the Handbook of Nonprescription Drugs: An Interactive Approach to Self-Care<sup>®</sup> 17th edition.<sup>27</sup> Additional required readings are also assigned to complement the textbook. The

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