



Research

# Facebook as a method to promote a mindset of continual learning in an ambulatory care pharmacy elective course

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## Abstract

The use of online resources and social media is commonplace among college students and practicing pharmacists. To capitalize on this trend, a Facebook group was created in a Doctor of Pharmacy elective course to promote a mindset of continual professional development and learning outside of the didactic curriculum. Doctor of Pharmacy students in their third professional year who were enrolled in an ambulatory care elective course were included in this group. A survey was developed to assess the use of Facebook to promote a mindset of continual learning. This survey was administered anonymously during the first and last weeks of the elective course to gauge students' changing perspectives toward the use of social media to promote a continual-learning mindset. The survey results indicate a significantly higher level of agreement by students that Facebook allowed them to stay up-to-date with pharmacy information and improved their confidence in locating new information relevant to pharmacy practice, and that it could be used as an effective educational tool. This study indicates Facebook has potential as an auxiliary education source for traditional didactic pharmacy curriculum. It improved students' perception of their knowledge and confidence in discussing up-to-date pharmacy information with each other and faculty. It also provided some guidance about the importance of learning new information in pharmacy practice. The application of Facebook, or other social media, in pharmacy education could provide enhanced faculty and student communication by capitalizing on a means of information delivery that current students are most accustomed to.

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## Introduction/background

The use of social media has changed the way people communicate and exchange information.<sup>1</sup> Social media is defined as “forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas,

personal messages, and other content (as videos).”<sup>2</sup> While the intent of these web-based applications was originally for social purposes, their use has now expanded into a variety of settings. Businesses, professional organizations, health care organizations, and practitioners are all using social media as a means to stay connected with each other and their patients/clients. The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) states “pharmacy professionals (including pharmacy students as professionals in training) should continue to incorporate these new tools (social media) into the armamentarium of pharmacy practice.”<sup>3</sup> The use of social media can enhance the opportunities to communicate and educate colleagues and patients.

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Facebook is one of the most commonly used social media platforms among college students. It is the preferred social networking site among 80–90% of college students, with 53% of students with a Facebook profile logging in at least daily.<sup>4,5</sup> A recent study found that pharmacists also use the internet and social media more often than other health care professionals do.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, health profession students prefer online media as their main source of information.<sup>6</sup> Despite the prevalence of its use, information regarding the effectiveness of Facebook as a pharmacy educational tool is minimal. Prior studies have shown that Facebook can serve as a tool to augment pharmacy course discussion.<sup>7,8</sup> In these courses, benefits of Facebook use included the following: allowing the students to contribute to and facilitate discussion threads, using Facebook for a non-social purpose, and having an opportunity for further information or clarification from faculty about topics not discussed in enough depth during classroom time. Online discussion also allowed students who were uncomfortable with speaking in front of a group of their classmates to express their comments or ideas to the class.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the use of Facebook provided a designated format for discussion among students of content covered in class, promoting student collaboration and understanding of material.<sup>8</sup> While these articles highlight the benefit to didactic learning through the use of Facebook, no studies have been done to evaluate its potential as a means to promote a mindset of, or process for, continual learning and education among pharmacy students of information presented outside the didactic curriculum.

### **Rationale and objectives**

The primary objective of this study was to assess the use of a social networking group via Facebook as a vehicle to promote a mindset of continual professional development and learning outside of the didactic curriculum in an ambulatory care elective Doctor of Pharmacy course. Continual professional development involves “the lifelong process of active participation in learning activities that assists individuals in developing and maintaining continuing competence, enhancing their professional practice, and supporting achievement of their career goals.”<sup>9</sup> The goal of Facebook use in this course was not to focus on the development of the learning process itself but to expose students to examples of resources available and the mindset required for developing this process when they become pharmacy practitioners. The use of Facebook was chosen as the forum for this exposure based on literature citing the prevalence of Facebook use among college students.<sup>4,8</sup> It was felt that since students are already frequently checking Facebook, they were more likely to be exposed to content posted on Facebook compared to other course-specific websites (i.e., Blackboard and OnCourse) that may be accessed less frequently. A secondary objective of this

study was to assess the use of Facebook as an educational tool.

### *Course philosophy and design*

An elective course was developed in 2011 for third-professional-year Doctor of Pharmacy (DPP-3) students focusing on commonly encountered disease states in adult ambulatory care pharmacy practice. The course was developed with two primary goals. The first goal was to expose students to evidence supporting or refuting the use of specific medications in ambulatory care pharmacy practice. A learner-centered teaching approach was incorporated to accomplish this goal. Each week, two groups of students were assigned a landmark clinical trial relating to an ambulatory care pharmacy topic and asked to present this to their peers. Faculty were present to facilitate this discussion and add clinical experience and insight to the student-led presentations.

The second goal of the course was to develop and promote a mindset of continual learning among students. Due to the importance of lifelong learning to a pharmacist, it was important to introduce students to learning opportunities outside the didactic curriculum. This learning outside the classroom was meant to represent the learning that must be done by pharmacists outside of their daily job responsibilities.

In addition to these primary goals, the course incorporated lectures on motivational interviewing with role-playing activities used to mimic patient counseling interactions. The course also consisted of a two-hour pharmacist panel of ambulatory care pharmacy practitioners, including ambulatory care clinical pharmacy specialists, community pharmacy medication therapy management specialists, ambulatory care pharmacy residents, and a community pharmacy-based academic fellow. During this panel, students were given a designated opportunity to interact with specialty-trained ambulatory care practitioners, or learners currently in ambulatory care pharmacy specialty training, to increase their understanding of roles that ambulatory care pharmacists can have within the profession.

Focusing on the second goal of the course, a social networking group on Facebook was developed as the means to expose students to new or up-to-date pharmacy information. This venue also provided a way to facilitate informal communication among students and instructors about current events or debates in ambulatory care pharmacy practice. Initial communication with students related to the use of Facebook reflected their concern about sharing their online profile with faculty and classmates who were not already their online “friends.” Therefore, the course coordinators chose to develop a designated, closed Facebook group to mitigate these privacy concerns. The Facebook group ensured that students did not have to “friend” any other student or faculty in the course but could still review all posts made by them. Similarly, posts made by students

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