



Review article

Social media: The next frontier for professional development in radiography

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ABSTRACT

Background: Radiographers are required to undertake professional development in order to maintain registration. Professional development activities can be passive and isolate the practitioner. Social media is an interactive, collaborative, instant form of communication, which potentially addresses these concerns.

Objectives: To establish whether the inherent challenges of social media use reduce its feasibility as a platform for professional development in radiography.

Methods: A systematic review was undertaken using the PRISMA Guidelines. Academic databases were searched using pre-defined search terms, limits and inclusion criteria.

Results: Zero reviewable papers were identified in the field of radiography globally. The search was expanded to “healthcare” and 810 papers were identified. After inclusion criteria and limits were applied, 12 papers were reviewed.

Conclusions: Professional development using social media includes higher education, collaboration and networking. Managed with consideration to the inherent risks, social media provides a new means of inclusive professional development.

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Introduction

Radiographers are required to undertake professional development in order to maintain registration. There are many activities that constitute professional development, ranging from online quizzes to conference attendance. However, existing professional development activities tend to be passive and one way, which is isolating for the practitioner. Research into radiographers' attitudes to professional development has shown a level of ambivalence towards its need, and focus on activities centred on the individual.¹ The same study revealed a “superadditive” effect of professional development when participation became part of the process. Without participation, the process would not be effective. The result of this study developed a dynamic process, which encouraged participation in professional development activities. However, in a study by Marshall, Punys and Sykes, participation was influenced by cost and travel.²

Social media is an interactive, collaborative, instant form of communication, which transcends geographical boundaries and social isolation. Social media, therefore, potentially addresses the issues identified by Henwood and Taket,¹ and by Marshall, Punys and Sykes.² There are, however, other issues with using social media including the risk to patient privacy and lack of professionalism. The question is, do the inherent challenges of social media use reduce its feasibility as a platform for professional development in radiography? In order to answer this question, two issues must be addressed: the benefits of social media as a platform for professional development and social media risks. The risks associated with social media use is well documented. Most social media policies address risk aversion including patient contact, ethics and professionalism. What is less researched is the potential of social media as a platform for professional development. This aspect will be the topic of this paper.

Within this context, two broad research questions are apparent:

1. What does current literature report as uses of social media for professional development in radiography?
2. How is social media used as professional development within radiography?

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This paper reports on the findings from a systematic review of the literature as a first step to answering these questions.³ A second stage to this research is necessary, involving the analysis of social media sites engaged in professional development (beyond the radiography industry). The second stage will be reported in a future paper, and is beyond the scope of this systematic review of the literature.

Australia is a country that experiences the issues for professional development as identified by Henwood and Taket, and by Marshall, Punys and Sykes, including practitioner isolation and huge distances to access resources. Radiography is a well established and well respected industry. There is a professional body for radiographers (called the Australian Institute of Radiography), a regulatory body (called the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia) and radiography is part of the nation's healthcare practitioner registration system (called the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency). For the purposes of setting the scene in professional development, Australia provides a useful context.

For the purposes of this review, the term "continuing professional development" was defined using the definition provided by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the industry body that regulates 14 health professions, one of which is the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia (MRPBA). Australian law, regulated by the AHPRA, legislates that all registered health practitioners must undertake professional development as a condition of registration (the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law).⁴

"Continuing professional development is the means by which members of the profession maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge, expertise and competence, and develop the personal and professional qualities required throughout their professional lives."⁵

The MRPBA is responsible for registering medical radiation practitioners, developing standards and approving accreditation standards of study. The MRPBA enforce a registration standard for continuing professional development at 60 h over three years (minimum of 10 h in one year). A large number of activities are eligible as professional development.⁵

The Australian Institute of Radiography (AIR) is the dominant industry body for Australian health professionals in Diagnostic Radiography/Medical Imaging, Radiation Therapy and Ultrasound. AIR has developed professional development activities for members, which meet the requirements of the MRPBA. Points are assigned for successful completion of the activity. Fifty points worth of activities equates to 20 h of professional development for registration with the MRPBA.⁶

In a survey of European radiographers, it was found that 95% believed professional development was important to their practice. Professional development was viewed as a means of demonstrating competent practice.¹ The European study found that radiographers preferred to access their professional development electronically or via the internet because of the time and cost associated with travel. Marshall, Punys and Sykes² listed a number of negative constraints associated with professional development including cost, geographical location, timing, quality, lack of confidence, lack of support, lack of availability and lack of relevance, which, they believed, could be overcome through access via the internet.

The AHPRA social media policy reminds practitioners of their obligations to the National Law, ethics and professionalism. Rather than prescribing what can and cannot be done using social media, members are referred to the expected behaviours set out in the Code of Conduct.

Defining social media

Social media is defined as the creation and exchange of user-generated content using internet-based applications.⁷ Social media is increasingly mobile and accessed via mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets and laptops. The most fundamental element of social media is that it is highly interactive where individuals co-create, share and modify user-generated content.⁸ Popular platforms for social media include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Wordpress and LinkedIn. There are many other platforms, although generally they share the main purposes of social networking, collaborative services, blogs, content hosting sites and virtual communities. Smaller, niche platforms exist which tend to target very specific user groups. A summary of some social media platforms is provided in Table 1. This table is not exhaustive, and represents only the more popular forms of social media.

Conducting the review

The systematic review followed the review process described in Mann, Gordon and MacLeod.⁹ Consistent with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines,¹⁰ the Central Queensland University library collection of academic subscription databases was searched through the DiscoverIt! search tool using the keywords: Australia, social media, radiography, radiographer, radiological technologist, professional development, blog, social networking, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Bibliographies of identified papers were also reviewed. The search was limited to Australian papers published after 2011, dealing with radiographer's access with, or use of, social media. 2011 was selected as the earliest date for searching the literature since social media is a recent phenomenon and has evolved quickly.

Zero results were returned relating to the use of social media as professional development in the radiography industry in Australia (see Table 2). The absence of academic records was a significant result and perhaps indicates a potential field of research in Australian radiography. The search terms were expanded to any English language papers, removing the reference to Australia. Zero results were returned relating to any global use of social media as professional development in radiography (see Table 2). This was, again, a significant result, confirming the need for radiography research in this area (see Table 3).

In Australia, radiography is part of the allied health industry, which also includes occupational therapy, physiotherapy, podiatry and nursing. The healthcare industry provided a broad base for research of which radiography shared similarities. Research into other medical disciplines could reasonably apply to radiographers in a broad context. It was felt that findings within the area of healthcare would be generally applicable to Australian radiographers. The search terms were broadened to include "healthcare", "healthcare practitioners" and "medical education".

The first Research Question was refined slightly to enable a wider search. What does current literature report as common uses

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