Oncology Hashtag Project

Recently, a poster was unveiled at ASCO15 that demonstrated the interest in oncology in the social media - specifically Twitter. Hashtags were developed for specific types of cancer with the goal of stimulating and directing twitter conversations about these types in order provide information, boost patient education and stimulate advocacy.

A large number of patients and healthcare professionals are now online and use the web to browse through medical information. The cancer tag oncology (CTO) was designed in July 2013. A study was conducted that evaluated 25 hashtags used on Twitter between April 2011 to September 2014. 100 most active users of each hashtag were classified on the basis of patient, doctor, non-doctor healthcare professional (HCP), individual NOS (I), healthcare organisation (HCO), other organisation (OO) or spam. The study analysed all tweet activity quarterly for all the tags.

The findings showed that a total of 531,765 tweets were made by 77,454 users. The most widely used tags were #bcsm: Breast cancer and #btsm: Brain Tumours. Other active tags included #ayacsm: Adolescent and young adult cancer; #gyncsm: Gynaecological cancer; #lcsm: Lung cancer; #mmsm: Multiple Myeloma; and #pancsm: Pancreatic cancer and these accounted for 93 percent of total Twitter activity. Among the users, 11 percent were patients, 20 percent were doctors, 3 percent HCP, 32 percent I, 30 percent HCO, 1 percent OO and 3 percent spam.

According to Dr. Matthew Katz, a radiation oncologist, "cancer-specific hashtags are a promising way to facilitate access to accurate health information and positive interactions. Our aim was to retrospectively evaluate Twitter use of the Cancer Tag Ontology and the types of users putting these hashtags into tweets."

Hashtags are a useful tool to filter out important information and make Twitter less noisy. Since there is already a great deal of discussion about healthcare on Twitter, it is not always easy to find relevant and reliable information. Disease-specific hashtags make it easier to streamline such information.

Source: American Society of Clinical Oncology

Image Credit: drupal.org

Published on : Tue, 16 Jun 2015