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## Tweet, like, follow – radiology goes viral



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Most of us virtually 'live' on social media. [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and other platforms are where most of us digitally communicate with each other and the world at large. Social media is perhaps the greatest opportunity doctors have to better communicate with their patients, help educate the next generation of physicians around the world, and help further population-based research. Radiology by definition- image and technology based- is an ideal field to take advantage of all the opportunities and benefits of this: like, follow, repeat, hashtag brave new world.

An article published in the [Journal of the American College of Radiology](#), considers the vast opportunities and potential challenges of using social media in radiology by asking healthcare professionals:

***How have you incorporated social media into your practice, and what advice do you have for radiologists who want to embrace it?***

**You may also like:** [Is radiology education ready for #SocialMedia?](#)

In recent years, radiologists have started to explore, use and experience the impact of social media towards value based patient care. Academic and medical journals have been researching and finding measurable value in using social media to improve patient satisfaction, to connect and create interactive education platforms for students and residents, to spread information on healthcare policy, to network and connect with peers and professionals around the world.

**[Dania Daye](#), MD, PhD, Resident, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Clinical Fellow, Harvard Medical School**

*"Social media is an emerging tool for professional branding for radiologists and their practices and is becoming an increasingly important venue for engaging patients, referring clinicians, and prospective faculty and trainees. Among the most successful institutions at embracing social media is the Mayo Clinic. They have used Facebook and Twitter to outreach to patients and caregivers, leading to a 139% increase in social media-initiated patient appointment requests in 2017 alone. At Massachusetts General Hospital, radiologists launched a social media campaign targeting both patients and referring clinicians to increase awareness about lung cancer screening that led to a 52% increase in the number of scheduled lung cancer screening examinations in the 20 weeks after the campaign.*

*As a trainee, social media has provided me access to an unparalleled network of mentors, interactive educational content, and peer networking opportunities. Joining Twitter has accelerated my professional development and has led to national committee service and interactions with national leaders in radiology. Those opportunities would have been otherwise difficult to access without social media. The use of social media in radiology has also been most helpful at national radiology meetings where it amplifies networking with others both at the meeting and beyond and allows for vibrant discussions about important topics in the field. Beyond professional society meetings, social media also provides access to Free-Open Access Radiology Education (#FOAMRad), where a number of radiology educators post cases of the day for the broader trainee community to benefit. Twitter is also an excellent venue for scheduling and conducting journal clubs and topic-focused discussions through tweet chats with national and international participants contributing.*

*Although social media provides a number of benefits, a number of disadvantages abound, including the time commitment to provide regular content and the responsibility of ensuring the validity of the content being promoted. Specific to patient engagement, establishing policies for communication with patients through social media remains an area in active development for many."*

Social media savvy radiologists are leveraging the vast potential influence of these platforms. Through specific hashtags and feeds like #radiology #imaging #mammography and @radiopaedia, @thexraydoctor, @mri\_technologist, @russian.radiology, @pediatricradiology, @radiologyacr with some having more than 20,000 followers-covering practically every facet of the field- both patients and doctors are using social media to communicate directly about medical imaging. Social media is an immediate route through which radiologists can share and expand knowledge and improve quality of care and the patient-doctor relationship.

Twitter is one of the most common and easiest platforms to navigate and provides radiologists immediate interaction. A "like", "retweet" and "reply" are the new normal in digital communication where radiologists easily connect with other healthcare professionals expanding their professional network and building on their reputation beyond the geographical limits of their practice. Social media platforms, like Twitter, give radiologists the opportunity to create new relationships with physicians around the world and help cultivate meaningful collaborations.

**[Stefan Tigges](#), MD, MSCR, Professor of Radiology, Emory University School of Medicine**

*"I teach anatomy, radiology, and medical cartooning. Twitter allows me to expand my audience from local to global. Because I have made lots of*

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mistakes, I have tips based on my impression of what works. My advice is based on no data whatsoever, but overall, it has worked for me and has allowed me to expand my network.

**Tip #1:** Twitter is a bite-size medium; keep your message bite sized.

**Tip #2:** Make your tweet self-contained (mostly). My first anatomy posts were crammed with disparate material and slowly loading links that no one clicked. Now, many of my teaching posts are figures and captions, with a brief image description, an explanation, and a picture.

**Tip #3:** You can add links for people who want to learn more. For example, when I introduce an artist to my cartooning students, I provide a link to that artist's work.

**Tip #4:** Because primates are visual creatures and love shiny objects, use pictures for their high educational value and to get attention. Twitter allows up to four pictures per post. You can "tag" up to 10 people per picture, improving the chance that your intended audience will see and retweet your post.

**Tip #5:** Make friends with people in other countries and other specialties. I am grateful that a neurosurgeon in the United Kingdom spotted several errors in my neuroanatomy teaching material. I exchange cartoons with surgeons and internists from all over the world. I have learned a ton about the struggles of our own referring physicians and our international brothers and sisters.

**Tip #6:** Go ahead, blow off some steam, but do not be mean, punch down, or lie. To fight against my own burnout, I invented a new superhero, "The Cinder," and occasionally post cartoons based on his fight against the soul-crushing abusiveness of spreadsheet and stopwatch-driven medicine.

**Tip #7:** Have some fun: go ahead and retweet that cat video."

Radiologists are using social media to teach and learn, by posting cases to illustrate issues that can help others in clinical practice. They ask questions, seek advice from peers and colleagues, share experience and knowledge that improve their own practice and help provide higher quality patient care. In addition the immediacy of social media communication brings the latest developing innovation and technology in radiology and medicine at their fingertips.

#### **Andrea Borondy Kitts, MS, MPH, Patient Outreach and Research Specialist, Lahey Hospital and Medical Center**

*"The main benefits of social media include sharing perspectives on topics of interest among and between different stakeholders. As a patient and patient advocate, I engage in Twitter conversations often, many of these with radiologists and radiation oncologists. For example, several recent Twitter conversations included: should or how should physicians ask about smoking in the context of lung cancer and lung cancer screening, a discussion around an article that addresses how physicians talking about patients as diseases and not as individuals may impact care, and another about an article, "Doctors told to ditch Latin and use plain language". A post with an article about a person who was both a doctor and a patient resulted in a weekend-long discussion about patient access to medical records and evolved into a discussion about social determinants of health and then moved to pharmaceutical companies' influence on physicians "caving in to patients" who want prescriptions they found out about through TV advertising. These conversations help radiologists and patients understand each other's context. I have seen physicians change to become more aware of patients and patient challenges as they interact in these Twitter conversations.*

*The benefits of social media are not just the conversation; they include the benefit of having dozens of people curate articles of interest from multiple sources all around the world. And arguably the best benefit of social media is meeting people you would never meet in your daily life. Many of the radiologists and radiation oncologists I met on Twitter I eventually did end up meeting in real life because of our Twitter connection. Some of these contacts resulted in collaborative work on projects and grants. I encourage all radiologists to join our social media community and become part of the journey to improved patient engagement and patient- and family-centered care."*

One of the most valuable aspects of radiology on social media is that it provides patients with easy access into who their healthcare providers are both professionally and personally. The informal nature of social media helps break the ice between the doctor and them much more so than in the clinical setting where the doctor in the white coat is the authority and helps humanise radiologists in the eyes of their patients, as well as create awareness that radiologists are in fact doctors and not mere technicians. Social media has furthermore proved to be a valuable tool for patient education and creating awareness on diseases and misinformation, as well as to connect patients with the appropriate doctor for their care.

#### **Amy K. Patel, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine**

*"Radiologists have an incredible opportunity to debunk myths about who we are and what we do through the advent of social media. Its ability to provide a patient-facing avenue has the potential to be truly transformative in the years to come. Our capacity to connect with and educate our patients is limitless, from providing education to answering patient questions and concerns. For my practice, social media will be paramount because I serve many rural patients and, oftentimes, the best way to reach them is through social media, particularly Facebook. Facebook is proving to be the best social media platform to reach a wide age range of patients. From Facebook live events to providing education to patients in the form of recurrent Facebook posts, to creating your own radiology department and practice accounts, we are in a unique position to "rebrand" ourselves and impact patient care in ways in which we have never seen previously.*

*The advice I give to radiologists of all practice types who want to embrace it is this: do not be fearful. The pros exceedingly outweigh the cons, and anyone at any age can dive in to embrace the world of health care social media. Maintaining a constant presence is key, and thus, having someone overseeing your department or practice accounts can be beneficial if such assistance is potentially available to you. However, your input is crucial in making your social media presence a success, so it is a time commitment. But, it will be a time commitment you never regret because it will only strengthen your message and, ultimately and most importantly, your relationships with your patients."*

While social media is a powerful tool for radiologists and medical imaging, there are challenges and traps to avoid. At first it can be hard to get started and understand the nuances of each social media platform. Social media also requires time, a valuable and scarce commodity for a radiologist. Using social media means having a constant conversation and this requires investing time and effort, many professionals chose to

have help managing their social media channels. One has to also be aware when sharing information to differentiate between their own opinion and information from other sources or individuals. Finally the protection and security of patient data and privacy and respecting it is fundamental.

Despite some challenges though, social media has unlimited potential for radiologists who tweet, like share, post.

Sources: [Journal of the American College of Radiology](#), [PubMed](#), [NCBI](#)

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