

# Social Media and Pediatric Hospital Medicine: How Our Discipline Benefits From a Virtual Community and Why It Matters for Our Future



Social media, defined as Internet-based applications that support the collaborative creation and exchange of user-generated content,<sup>1</sup> is now part of our culture. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Doximity, blogs, and wikis are pervasive means of communication and information dissemination in our society. For physicians, this transparent way of communicating affects patient expectations, engagement, and education.<sup>2,3</sup> Whether these methods are being used to network professionally, advocate for public health, or to provide patient outreach and education, physician use and awareness of social media influence their clinical practice and professional engagement.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AT PEDIATRIC HOSPITAL MEDICINE

At the Pediatric Hospital Medicine (PHM) conference in 2012, the planning committee and conference attendees dedicated resources to social media. The primary objective for the use of Facebook was to publicize conference events and content. The primary objective for the use of Twitter was to increase conference participants' engagement and satisfaction, as well as reach a larger audience on topics pertinent to PHM.

At the PHM conference in 2013, social media faculty again supported Twitter and Facebook activity. In addition, the conference hashtag (#PHM2013) was registered with the Symplur (Upland, CA) Healthcare Hashtags Project (<http://www.simplur.com/healthcare-hashtags/>).

Between 2012 and 2013, participants using social media on both platforms increased (Fig 1). The overall number of impressions for Tweets tagged #PHM2013 was 903 797, nearly 10 times higher than the smaller sampling of #PHM2012 the previous year.

## WHAT ARE THE METRICS OF "SUCCESS" IN SOCIAL MEDIA?

Objectives in 2012, the first year of a dedicated social media presence at the PHM conference, were to enhance conference attendees' experiences and to share the ideas at PHM with an audience beyond the actual conference attendees. Given the positive qualitative responses by those participating actively in social media platforms and the fact that using Twitter allowed us to reach ~10 times as many people as attended the conference itself, we feel these initial objectives were met in the pilot year.

However, this positive impact on thousands of Twitter feeds and hundreds of Facebook accounts contrasts sharply with the exit survey in 2012. Fewer than 10% of attendees who completed the survey reported finding social media useful

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## KEY WORDS

communication, information technology, professional network social media, professionalism, teamwork/interprofessional cooperation

## ABBREVIATIONS

AAP: American Academy of Pediatrics

PHM: pediatric hospital medicine

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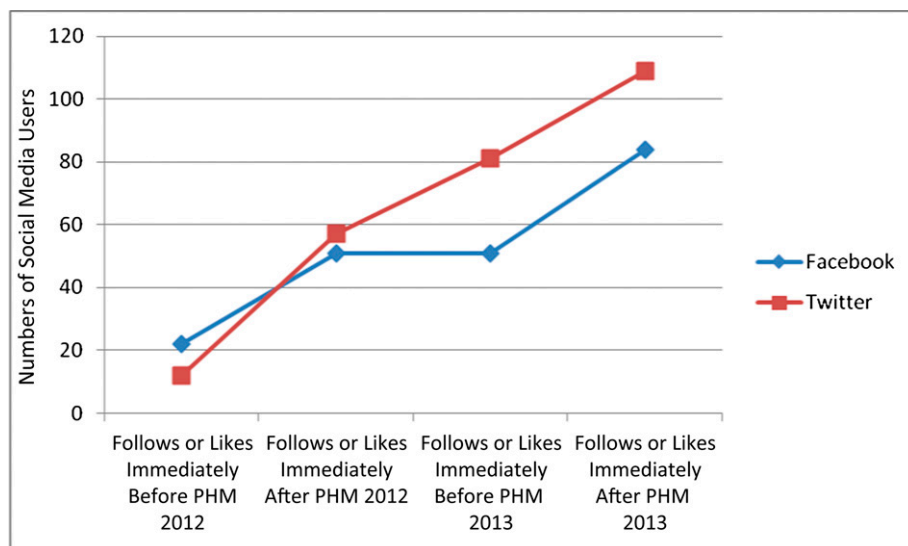
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**FIGURE 1** Social media activity on Facebook and Twitter for PHM conferences.

during the conference, although 79% reported that they were “aware” of it.

Conference planners are left wondering why there is a disparity between the feedback from the social media users and those of the survey respondents. Does this disparity mean that social media’s utility is too limited to benefit the larger group?

A review of the content and contributors in both 2012 and 2013 reveals that a relatively small group of active social media users were able to generate a substantial impact. On Twitter, >90% of the tweets for 2012 were generated by 38 unique users. In 2013, a total of 52 contributors produced >10 times the number of conference tweets. It is possible that analysis of the social media participants and the survey respondents’ results represent 2 very different groups of conference attendees: those who are engaged in social media use and those who are not. Another possibility is that the “value” of social media at an academic conference is widely variable given that physicians also use social media for

personal reasons; it is not a platform or networking tool that is exclusive to their professional presence. For these and other reasons, metrics for what constitutes “scholarly” use of social media, as well as the quality of content generated on social media, remain to be validated; however, there are some emerging trends that will define them.

#### Raise the Profile of Our Discipline and National Conference

Other academic meetings have begun to use social media as an attendee engagement tool and a metric of success.<sup>4,5</sup> Twitter use by attendees at the American Society of Clinical Oncology 2010 and 2011 meetings was measured retrospectively. Chaudhry et al<sup>6</sup> noted that although the total number of Twitter authors was low, both on-site live attendees and off-site, nonattendee Twitter users were engaged in reporting, discussion, and commentary and that Twitter usage increased significantly; these findings are similar to what we saw at PHM 2012. Future conference social media could be

analyzed for content, guiding social media organizers to meet conference attendees’ needs, as well as engaging others outside of attendees and raising the PHM profile.

#### Professional Network Development

Physicians and other health care professionals are using Twitter to connect with each other and disseminate information.<sup>7,8</sup> Because of the interactivity and the ability to quickly find a community of people who have similar interests, Twitter has become a source of enrichment and development. By participating in such a “community of practice” with fellow physicians, each member is constantly pushing the group forward in the shared pursuit of mastering the profession of medicine. Twitter has also been identified as a possible metric for predicting future citations of scientific articles,<sup>9</sup> which speaks both to the broad impact as well as the quality of discourse in social media.

#### Catalyzing Collaboration and Problem Solving

Most professionals who tweet in “real-time” at conferences are engaged in interpreting and sharing the conference experience. Twitter users may provide immediate commentary and perspective, as well as linking referenced articles. This type of audience participation can introduce a more engaging dynamic to keynote addresses and lectures.

In addition, interacting on Facebook or Twitter with a professional colleague often catalyzes a meeting “IRL” (in real life) at a conference. Not only does it improve the in-person interaction at the meeting, it is a catalyst to a broader professional network. These in-person meetings then spark further collaboration in the form of workshops, research project, and manuscripts.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PEDIATRIC HOSPITALISTS USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

The direction and power of the PHM Facebook and Twitter accounts should be considered an asset to the conference and PHM as a discipline, as well as a responsibility. Hospital medicine and pediatric hospitalists have a reputation of being early adopters, and we already have a self-identified group of passionate and creative individuals using social media (#tweetiatricians). Social media does reflect that pediatric hospitalists are proportionally more active than nonhospitalist counterparts. At time of publication, the *Hospital Pediatrics* Facebook page<sup>10</sup> has the largest number of “likes” among all American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) journals at 23 055. By comparison, *Pediatrics*, which has a significantly larger circulation, has 13 700 Likes. Since November 2012, the Facebook page of *Hospital Pediatrics* averaged 14 new “likes” monthly while other AAP-sponsored sites ranged from 2 to 7. One of the most popular posts on the Facebook page is Dr. Fleming Beach’s essay, “What’s in a Name?”<sup>11</sup> Over 7000 people utilized Facebook to access the piece, dozens “liked” it, 4 commented on it, and 22 actually shared the article. Posts on the *Pediatrics* Facebook page averaged 5 “likes” for any 1 posting in the last 6 months.

Because social media is now woven into the fabric of our culture, physicians can remain relevant and important influences by developing skills to control their presence in social media. A presence and professional identity in social media is not a critical part of being a successful physician, but it is an important enhancement to

professional networking and community. As a group, we must identify how social media can help strengthen our professional network, collaboration, and collective voice as pediatric hospitalists; academic meetings are a prime opportunity to do this.

The annual PHM conference is highly anticipated and has consistently exceeded registration numbers. For the several hundred pediatricians in attendance, the conference provides an energizing and unique chance to engage with their professional community. Social media platforms allow participants to share ideas, links, and photos during the conference and convey their experience to a much larger audience.

Not every attendee at PHM conferences will find the social media an asset. However, as part of the social media team, we hope a larger group will use it to connect. At future PHM conferences, social media activity will be assessed with increasing deliberation so that the PHM social media presence is clearly defined. Activities for future PHM conferences include:

- Live tweeting of articles and links during keynote addresses and Top 10 article luncheons
  - Daily summary of photos and highlights posted on the Facebook page
  - Real-time questions and feedback during sessions
  - “Tweetups”: an in-person meeting for active Twitter participants
- Henry Melvill said, “A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic

threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.”<sup>12</sup> Social media is a potent catalyst to those connections and effects, and pediatric hospitalists are poised to use it for the benefit of our patients and our discipline.

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