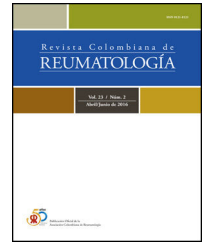




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Editorial

The role of social media assessing mental health in rheumatology



El papel de las redes sociales en la evaluación de la salud mental en reumatología

In recent years, the landscape of healthcare has witnessed a profound transformation, owing much to the pervasive influence of social media. In the field of rheumatology, where individuals often grapple with chronic conditions such as axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA), the significance of mental health cannot be overstated. The intricate interplay between physical symptoms and the emotional well-being of patients underscores the need for a holistic approach to care. Specifically, in axSpA, which can profoundly impact daily functioning and quality of life, addressing mental health is paramount. Patients navigating the challenges of chronic pain, fatigue, and physical limitations may experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, or depression. Recognizing and prioritizing mental health within the spectrum of rheumatological care is not just a compassionate consideration but a fundamental aspect of comprehensive patient management. Several studies have already shown that depression is one of the most common comorbidities in patients with axSpA including ankylosing spondylitis (AS). In these patients, depression is associated with more severe disease activity and functional impairment. Identifying and managing depression should form part of their holistic care.¹ The diagnosis of depression in rheumatic diseases is important, because this psychological state may influence other outcomes, such as compliance with medication and disease activity.

This editorial aims to shed light on a recent study published in *Revista Colombiana de Reumatología*, assessing the correlation between social media usage and depression in a Turkish population of patients with AS.² The implications of this research have far-reaching consequences for both patients and healthcare providers in the sphere of rheumatology. The study, conducted on 155 AS patients, utilized a well-designed self-administered questionnaire to capture vital data, including demographic information, educational status, diagnosis, and the preferred social network of participants. To assess

depression levels, the Beck Depression Inventory-IA amended in Turkish (BDI-IA-Turkish) was employed.

The findings of this cross-sectional study reveal a stark and significant difference in depression scores between AS patients who actively engage with the Internet (12.18 ± 7.85) and social media (12.35 ± 7.90) compared to those who do not (27.19 ± 10.51 vs. 25.20 ± 11.66) with a p-value of ≤ 0.001 . Notably, a dominant 73.5% of participants reported using smartphones, with WhatsApp emerging as the preferred social network (66.5%), followed by Facebook (52.9%), Instagram (52.3%), Twitter (19.4%), and Pinterest (5.8%). Crucially, social media users and non-users demonstrated striking similarities in age, gender, educational level, and marital status. Moreover, the study found no significant differences concerning the type and duration of social media use in relation to depression scores. The significant disparity in depression scores between social media users and non-users implies that embracing these digital platforms could be instrumental evaluating the mental health and even mental well-being of individuals having chronic diseases. The prevalence of smartphone usage, particularly in accessing social media, indicates the ubiquity and accessibility of these platforms among AS patients. WhatsApp's emergence as the preferred social network may suggest the need for physicians to consider these platforms when developing strategies for patient engagement and support during the follow-up of this condition. The convergence of social media users and non-users in demographic and social characteristics may imply that these platforms have the potential to be inclusive, reaching a broad spectrum of patients regardless of age, gender and education. The outcomes of this study underscore the pivotal role of social media in providing support and assessing depression among AS patients and even in the full spectrum of SpA patients including psoriatic arthritis (PsA).³

In light of these findings, health policymakers and practitioners are urged to recognize the transformative impact of social media on patient well-being. Tailoring health policies to integrate social media as a tool for patient support and education becomes imperative. Identifying and promoting the most effective and widely used forms of social media can be a cornerstone in the stewardship of health policies, paving the way for a more patient-centric and digitally informed approach to rheumatological care.

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare, embracing the potential of social media is not merely an option but a necessity for fostering holistic patient care and support in the realm of rheumatology. Considering the fact that some sociocultural variables might affect the outcome of research, further research developed in other parts of the world including Latin America, may be helpful to find out whether the findings reported by Uslu et al will be similar or at least validated.

Finally, by fostering a supportive environment that integrates mental health strategies, rheumatologists and healthcare providers may enhance the overall well-being of individuals living with axSpA, promoting resilience and empowering them in their journey towards improved health outcomes.

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