

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[Translated article] The importance of online presence and best practices for the orthopedic surgeon in social media



La importancia de la presencia *online* y buenas prácticas en redes sociales para el Cirujano Ortopédico

Dear Editor,

Benefits of having an online presence

The public wants access to our operating theatres via the Internet. They want to see what we do and how we do it, preferably in real time. As a result, the Internet has become the primary source of health information and guidance for our patients in recent years.

The direct and indirect benefits of having an appropriate social media (SM) presence, can be summarised in the following five points: increased visibility, professional networking, bringing the medical community closer to the patient, and health education.

The power of the profile

Managing a professional profile on social media gives us the opportunity to make our work as orthopaedic surgeons visible to the general public and the rest of the scientific community. Our professional SM profile needs to be adapted to society's own expectations of medical practice. It is therefore advisable to separate personal and professional accounts.

The description that frames each profile should include keywords related to our subspecialty, as the orthopaedic surgeon provides value as such and with the subspecialty that he/she is developing. Our biography should also provide information about our interests and current work situation.

The image projected by our profile should correspond to that perceived during our face-to-face practice. We should

pay attention to the language, forms and even the profile picture, which we use to strengthen the patient's trust.

It is difficult to find a balance between the personal and the professional in terms of digital images and to unite them in the same profile. Every detail counts in defining our participation on the Internet, knowing that it is the user who will ultimately determine the character of our profile based on the message perceived. In order to convey the desired message and generate positive feedback from our audience, it is essential that we first define our objectives and choose the right channel.

Use of photographs and videos

The sharing of images, especially X-rays of patients, is not without controversy. When medical information about a patient is used on social media, it is essential not only to obtain the explicit consent of the patient, but also to ensure that the patient is not identifiable in any way. Even the most innocent photo can undermine the pillars of medical ethics.

However, for practitioners who regularly share their work on social media, photographs are being overtaken by video as the preferred medium for showing clinical cases or a surgical procedure. The rise of short video clips, together with the proliferation of applications that simplify their editing and the possibility of sharing them on social media, has managed to increase user interaction and engagement with their followers. These features have encouraged their use over image content.

Personal opinion vs. professional opinion

SM is the ideal platform for medical disclosure and because of the spontaneity and immediacy it offers, seeking the professional opinion of an orthopaedic surgeon has become an everyday act. Despite doctors' inherent solidarity, there is no obligation to give direct medical advice to a patient on social media. They can always be referred to sites of health interest that will help them address their concerns.

However, publishing controversial posts of a non-medical nature on our professional profile can affect our reputation and have repercussions for our profession. It is our duty to maintain certain standards of behaviour even when using social media; as mentioned above, our participation on the Internet must convey the values and attitudes that we develop in our professional practice.

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The importance of privacy and legal implications

Any information published with personal or even contextual data can be identified. Breaches of medical confidentiality not only have legal consequences, but also undermine the basis of a good doctor-patient relationship.

The reach of Internet postings is uncertain and sometimes permanent. Even when removed, content posted on social media is replicated on remote servers that are inaccessible to the average user and can be picked up by other users.

Conclusion

The traditional ‘word of mouth’ method of finding a trauma specialist has been widely used for decades. Today we live in technology-driven world. This has led to the proliferation of personal websites, opinion blogs, and the orthopaedic surgeon’s involvement in social media.

There is no online medical information that can replace face-to-face diagnosis and management of the patient’s pathology. However, there are numerous benefits to be gained from leaving our ‘digital footprint’ on the Internet.

Patients inevitably turn to the Internet to supplement the information they receive before or after a visit to a specialist, independently of the face-to-face visit. The latter is used to try to resolve concerns that have not been addressed through other channels. They rely on Google suggestions when choosing who to be treated by and share their medical experiences on social media.

An online presence has thus become a differentiator. Super-specialisation also plays a differentiating role in attracting future patients. In addition, positioning ourselves online as super-specialised orthopaedic surgeons brings added value to the medical community and the patient, and this is the direction in which our publications should be directed.

Among the various options that allow us to share content and increase our online visibility, social media has emerged as the dissemination platform par excellence. The uniqueness of social media lies in its immediacy and wide reach. It is a means of global dissemination, tends to use language that is more understandable to the general public, and offers us the possibility of segmenting its content.

Health networking, together with the collaboration of professionals in the same field of knowledge or the latest scientific updates, will not be our only gain.

The online doctor-patient relationship is a two-way street. In addition to the social marketing that we can achieve through our participation on social media, an online presence allows patients to obtain quality medical information from specialists in traumatology and orthopaedics.

Scientific evidence also supports this practice: greater patient adherence to treatment and satisfaction has been demonstrated in situations where quality information is available to the patient before and after the consultation with the orthopaedic surgeon.

Level of evidence

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Conflict of interests

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