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Caring Through Connecting: Social Media and Its Impacts on Rheumatologic Care

Announcer:

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This episode of *Living Rheum*, titled "Caring Through Connecting: Social Media and Its Impacts on Rheumatologic Care" is sponsored by Novartis US Clinical Development and Medical Affairs. The host and speaker have been compensated for their time. This program is intended for health care professionals.

Here's your host, Dr Jason Liebowitz.

Dr. Liebowitz:

Nearly 3 billion people worldwide use social media platforms, such as Facebook, and that number continues to grow. But can rheumatologists use these platforms to improve patient care? This is ReachMD, and I'm Dr. Jason Liebowitz. Joining me to discuss the role of social media in improving the care of the patients in rheumatology is Dr. Michael Putman, an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Division of Rheumatology at the Medical College of Wisconsin. Dr. Putman is also the Associate Fellowship Program Director and Medical Director of the Vasculitis Program. Dr. Putman, thanks for being here today.

Dr. Putman:

Hi, thanks for having me. You forgot to mention that I am also on Twitter, so I am qualified to talk about Twitter.

Dr. Liebowitz:

Well, with that lead-in, Dr. Putman, can you tell us how you use social media to stay up to date on the medical literature?

Dr. Putman:

Alright, so that's a great question. I actually got into Twitter for an important reason, that I think is underappreciated and that's accountability. I really wanted to make sure that I was still reading articles, and that when I read them, I spent enough time reading them to understand them, and I realized that if I shared that with people, it would encourage me to do a very good job of it. And there was a remarkably large number of smart people on Twitter, who are looking to engage and talk about studies, and ideas, and I have found that it's very rewarding to engage with people, but it's also very helpful for me personally, to just make sure that I'm continuing to try to do a good job of understanding new information as it comes down the pipeline.

I mean, the other thing that I do is I try to challenge myself. I follow a diverse group of people, many of whom see medicine in different ways than I do, many who have very different beliefs than I do about other things outside of medicine, and I try to learn from them, and challenge my own preconceptions. I think that just as a small example, I've been very critical of epidemiology in the past, but following people who do epi, and are really into observational data, I have come to be incredibly enthusiastic about it, and so that's sort of a bias that I had, that interacting with smart people on Twitter who thought differently than me sort of convinced me that I was a little bit too reductionist about it. And so, I think that it's a good way to challenge yourself and learn new things about practice.

Dr. Liebowitz:

That's wonderful. And how do you recommend rheumatologists disseminate information to colleagues on social media?

Dr. Putman:

Oh, well, cautiously is the most important thing. But, for a real answer. I think that the first recommendation I have for people, when they say they want to start talking about things is to actually read the articles you're going to talk about. I think that there's a lot of danger to

hot takes if you haven't tried to become informed about the topic. Now you don't have to be right about things to talk about them. It's totally fine to say something, and have someone correct you and say, "Wow, that was wonderful. I'm really glad I learned that." But I encourage you to spend time first, to make sure you understand the topic and the article before you spread it, because incorrect information can really get around the Twitter verse quite quickly. Think of the old quote by Churchill, that a lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can get its pants on. And, I think, you know, with Twitter, it's like, the truth hasn't even grabbed their pants, you know. They're looking for their pants and they're not there yet.

The other thing I recommend is try to be personal. I mean, if you have quirky sense of humor, let it shine through. My favorite accounts are all ones of people who – they just have idiosyncratic, they have this specific way of viewing the world, and – and, you know, it's enjoyable seeing tweets from people who are very particular in the way they view things. And so, I think if you have like a quirky, weird, thing that you can do, or that you're interested in, you should embrace that and be personal.

Dr. Liebowitz:

I think that's very well said, and you're exactly right. Social media allows physicians and others to share their personality, but we also have to make sure that when we spread or disseminate information, especially in this age of COVID pandemic, publications that come online before having really thorough peer review, that it's not just all hot takes, as you said.

So, as we know, many clinicians have a Facebook page for their practice, or they post to Twitter, and patients are well aware of that. Dr. Putman, how do you use social media in your own clinical practice, to help engage and connect with patients, and how do you also connect with your colleagues through social media?

Dr. Putman:

That's a great question. I mean, I think that connecting to colleagues through social media has been a lot of fun. And it's just great getting to meet people, in national meetings, who I only knew on Twitter, and, getting to just – I've met a lot of people that I would not have known otherwise. And so, I think just being there to interact with each other on Twitter is a great way to facilitate real, actual friendships. As long as you understand that you need to make that next step.

As far as interacting on Twitter, I mean, I think that a lot of doctors talk on Twitter to each other, and there's this thing that happens when doctors start talking to each other, where you kind of feel like you're probably in a HIPAA-safe zone, but Twitter is not your work room. It's not a safe space. It is a public space. It's a public forum, and anything you say can be read by not only people who are patients of someone else, but your own patients can read the things you're saying, and I try to be very cognizant of that. I have a lot of patients who come in and talk to me about something that I said on Twitter, and the first time it happened, I was a little bit taken aback, and then I realized that of course they are reading those things. And I think you should be very aware of that when you're tweeting. But, in a lot of ways, it can be a positive thing. I have a lot of people who have come to me because they said they enjoyed my perspective on some particular thing, so it can work both ways. You just need to be aware of who the audience for your tweets could be.

Dr. Liebowitz:

And I think that's very well said, and in cases where we demonstrate empathy or trying see things from the perspective of our patients, I think that can be very helpful, and reaffirming for patients that we see.

If you're just joining us, I'm Dr. Jason Liebowitz, and this is a special episode of Living Rheum. Joining me for this discussion is Dr. Michael Putman.

Can you talk a little bit, as an academics physician, about the role you feel social media does and can play, in connecting researchers or clinicians, helping people collaborate?

Dr. Putman:

Oh man, this is another favorite topic of mine. So, I have used this Twitter quite a bit from an academic perspective. So, I have had papers that have been inspired by tweets, because someone said something, and I thought to myself, that's not quite right. One of those projects took 2 and a half years, and it was just published in *Lancet Rheum* a couple months ago, and so, this is actually where tweets have inspired academic work.

And then, aside from that, I've also worked on projects with people who I only know through Twitter, where I met them on Twitter, and we both had shared interests, and we started working together, and some of my favorite collaborators now started as Twitter friends. A couple of them I have still yet to meet in person, and I'm excited to in the future here.

And honestly, I actually think, you know, the COVID pandemic has been just a horrific mess, but there was a very inspiring thing that happened from the Twitter community. Um, not me, but a couple people tweeted about how rheumatologists should really get together and collect data, and from that was born the Global Rheumatology Alliance, which is an international group of people who are

collaborating. There's, I think, of almost a hundred different providers who have participated very actively in it, and probably a thousand who have participated, you know, indirectly. And I mean, they've published dozens and dozens and dozens of papers. They've really characterized how the pandemic has affected people with rheumatic diseases, and I think it's just a sign that there's a lot of latent interest, where a lot of us want to connect, and do things that are meaningful, and I see Twitter as potentially being a useful way to make that happen. And, you know, it gets a bad rap, and it deserves it, but there are definitely some good things that come from it, and I think that's a shining example.

Dr. Liebowitz:

What do you think the future of social media in medicine will look like over the next 20 to 30 years?

Dr. Putman:

That's a great question. I think that you can already have some hints of that, if you have any nephews or nieces, who own a phone. And the answer is not Facebook. I mean, a lot of them are engaging in a number of new platforms – TikTok being the one that is most surprising to me and seems to be capturing the most hearts and minds. I think short, engaging videos are very interesting to people, and I think that the more legacy social media platforms are sort of losing ground to those.

But, you know, I think that while the media may change, I think that over time, you know, there's a couple principles that won't. I mean, I think that you should make efforts to share between people, but you should make efforts to be sure that what you're sharing is true, at least to the best of your knowledge. And so, continuing to engage with the things that you're going to say, and continuing to try to generate good content, I think, is going to be important. I think that patients will continue to be on TikTok, or whatever platform it winds up being, and you should be professional because they very well may be reading and watching what you're saying and doing, and so I think it's very important to act always as if the person who is reading your content is someone who will be walking into your clinic tomorrow.

Dr. Liebowitz:

Wonderful. I hope a lot of people tweet out this podcast episode, and I really want to thank you, Dr. Michael Putman, for being our guest on this episode, and for helping us to better understand the role of social media in improving patient care. Thank you so much.

Dr. Putman:

Well, thanks for having me, and I have to thank you also. One of my favorite podcasts today, forced their guest to introduce themselves using 140 characters or less, and you did not do that to me, so I appreciate it, because that's not that many characters. So, thanks again for having me. This was a lot of fun.

Dr. Liebowitz:

My pleasure.

Announcer:

This industry podcast was sponsored by Novartis US Clinical Development and Medical Affairs. If you missed any part of this discussion or to find others in this series, visit reachmd.com/living-rheum. This is ReachMD. Be part of the knowledge.

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