

Instagram: A Social Media Tool to Strengthen and Supplement the Delivery of Medical Education

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Abstract

The process of transforming young students into competent medical graduates is a challenging one, wherein as teachers, we have to adopt a combination of innovative and traditional teaching-learning approaches to meet the needs of different types of learners. In the current era, the majority of teachers and medical students has access to the Internet and use smartphones. Instagram is a social media application that provides a platform for users to share image-based or video-based information. The findings of studies have revealed that the application has been utilized by teachers to share images dealing with infectious diseases and radio-diagnosis, and this, in turn, inculcates clinical reasoning and critical thinking skills. To conclude, the utility and reach of social media applications, including Instagram, are increasing among medical students each day. The need of the hour is to acknowledge the scope of the same and use the same for the benefit of students either in the form of passing specific information or through a structured curriculum to ensure attainment of the learning outcomes.

Keywords: Instagram, medical education, social media

INTRODUCTION

The process of transforming young students into competent medical graduates is a challenging one, wherein as teachers, we have to adopt a combination of innovative and traditional teaching-learning approaches to meet the needs of different types of learners.^[1] At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the students of today are much different from those earlier, and that is predominantly because of the availability of resources and opportunities for them.^[2] Medical students are no longer dependent on their teachers to acquire knowledge and skills, rather they have access to a plethora of resources at their fingertips, which they can access at their time of convenience, which is again never within the four walls of the classroom setting.^[1-3]

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICAL TEACHING

The presence of the above-mentioned factors makes medical teaching an exciting prospect for the teachers, as they no longer remain the sole source of an information

provider, but have to discharge the role of a facilitator.^[2] The booming information technology has revolutionized every sector, and the same stands true even in the field of medical education.^[2,3] The medical students can access a wide range of information, including recent updates on all the topics, and stay abreast with the developments, which altogether plays a crucial role in the attainment of the intended learning outcomes.^[1,2,4] The need of the hour is to integrate information technology in the process of delivery of medical education and ensure that eventually both students and teachers are benefited mutually.^[1,2]

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Submission: 29-Apr-2022 **Accepted:** 09-May-2022 **Published:** 29-Sep-2022

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How to cite this article: Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS. Instagram: A social media tool to strengthen and supplement the delivery of medical education. Med J Babylon 2022;19:496-8.

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:
www.medjbabylon.org

DOI:
10.4103/MJBL.MJBL_64_22

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MEDICAL EDUCATION

In the current era, the majority of teachers and medical students has access to the Internet and use smartphones. Further, most medical students use social media to interact with friends and family members, as these applications are the most economical and feasible tool to ensure worldwide collaboration.^[4-7] Different social media applications (viz., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.) have been employed by various departments in medical institutions to facilitate learning beyond college hours and at the convenience of the students.^[8-11] In fact, many departments have formed WhatsApp groups with each batch of students, and these groups are utilized not only to pass information about the class and examinations, but also to encourage case discussion and instill clinical reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.^[11]

Further, as these applications are also being utilized by the general population, including patients, it becomes quite easy for the healthcare team to pass on the laboratory or radiological reports or share important advice/instructions, which together plays an important role in the provision of quality-assured healthcare services.^[7-10] The emergence of the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic resulted in restrictions on the movement of people (to minimize the risk of transmission of infection).^[7,12] In these testing times, social media applications were useful not only for the general population but also for medical students, as some of the departments initiated asynchronous learning via these applications, and this supplemented the process of medical teaching.^[8-10]

INSTAGRAM AND MEDICAL EDUCATION

Instagram is a social media application that provides a platform for users to share image-based or video-based information. It is an extremely popular application among the general population with users in excess of one billion globally.^[12] Considering its popularity among youths, it is an ideal opportunity for medical teachers and educators to tap the potential of Instagram and use the same for the delivery of medical content.^[12,13] The findings of studies have revealed that the application has been utilized by teachers to share images dealing with infectious diseases and radio-diagnosis.^[14] The students can be asked to identify the diagnosis based on the clinical or radiological image, and this, in turn, inculcates clinical reasoning and critical thinking skills.^[13,14]

At the same time, multiple Instagram accounts are moderated by specialist doctors, and thousands of medical students or postgraduate residents have found them extremely useful.^[12,13] In a medical institution, the resident-as-teacher program was implemented in multiple specialties using the Instagram application.^[15] The admin

for these accounts was medical students themselves, and they shared content pertaining to history taking, physical examination, laboratory results, radiological images, brief lecture videos, etc.^[15] This initiative proved that Instagram can be very much utilized in a structured way to deliver online medical education, as the feedback obtained from the users was quite encouraging.^[15,16]

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

In general, medical teachers have expressed their reservations not only with Instagram but with all social media applications, as these apps are addictive and minimize the time spent by students on outdoor activities.^[5,13] At times, students have been subjected to cyber-bullying, which becomes quite stressful for them. Moreover, the general perception of parents and adults is that the time spent on the mobile phones has an inverse proportion to the marks secured in examinations.^[5,8] As teachers, we cannot restrict the time spent by medical students on social media applications as they are adult learners; nevertheless, the provision of a structured program can significantly enhance the involvement of students in the learning process.^[5,13] Further, stating ground rules for the Instagram conversations right at the start can minimize the incidence of cyber-bullying, as the application will be used only for academic purposes.^[6,7]

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the utility and reach of social media applications, including Instagram, are increasing among medical students each day. The need of the hour is to acknowledge the scope of the same and use the same for the benefit of students either in the form of passing specific information or through a structured curriculum to ensure attainment of the learning outcomes.

Ethical consideration

Not applicable.

Authors' contribution

SRS contributed in the conception or design of the work, drafting of the work, and approval of the final version of the article and agreed for all aspects of the work. PSS contributed in the literature review, revision of the article for important intellectual content, and approval of the final version of the article and agreed for all aspects of the work.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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