

COMMUNICATIONS

Social Networking and Plastic Surgery Education: Running International Plastic Surgery

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Dear Editor:

Social networking has become an integral part of everyday life with an increasing number of hours spent per day interacting online with both familiar and unfamiliar people.

Geographic boundaries have changed and communication costs have decreased drastically. Today, we can interact with others with a simple click, and smartphone technology has made these interactions not only global but also portable and handy, and has enabled us to communicate continuously with our friends, relatives, and colleagues worldwide. Further, mailing lists such as Surginet have been a mean of interactive communication for more than 2 decades now [1,2].

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn integrate with professional websites and have made interaction with medical professionals and their staff easier than ever.

Plastic surgeons have pioneered social network marketing due to the commercial nature of cosmetic surgery and medicine in practice, and several moderated or non-moderated Facebook groups and pages keep people with similar interests together and interacting. In fact, today, surgeons interact through blogs and Facebook pages, comment on real cases, and create polls and plastic surgery links on these websites to increase their audience, and potentially attract patients.

Several aspects of medical education have changed as well [3], and as a founder (in 2013) and the main administrator of the International Plastic Surgery (IPS) Facebook group [4], I can witness the speed and efficacy of specialists from the field of plastic surgery in interacting with each other and exchanging ideas, videos, and images

in real time.

IPS is the natural evolution of a Facebook group of Italian residents in plastic surgery that I had previously founded and that had the primary goal of exchanging information about meetings and courses.

In less than a year, IPS has gathered over 1,200 members from all over the world including not only trainees, but also internationally known plastic surgeons and professors. Entry to the group is managed by a set of administrators who verify identities, medical credentials, and board certification in plastic surgery with a thorough process.

Instant sharing of images, while protecting patients' privacy through the group settings, allows members to share images, videos, and links with each other. Commentaries to cases and posts are long and educational.

Copyrighted material is shared through personal messages according to Facebook's copyright policy [5].

The group has always received positive feedback, has been featured in several meetings, and is to date, the most popular social networking group in the field of plastic surgery. In fact, it has become a social networking model, and recently, several similar groups have been formed on Facebook.

The economic cost of running this group is negligible, as the main goal of the group is communicative and educational, but group management is time consuming, particularly the verification process of new members, as several requests to join are received every day from non-medical or non-core specialty medical doctors.

Facebook policies, national scientific societies, and universities, along with my will to maintain and increase this group, will determine the group's destiny in the near and distant future, as the amount of medical intelligence contained in the Facebook group is large and invaluable.

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