S
eeing high-quality research articles alongside pictures of smiling children and funny cat videos may seem unusual at first, but when you look across the social media landscape this is fairly normal. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, and the other available platforms, web sites, and applications can be daunting for the novice user. As the use of social media is now intertwined in society, it is important for the clinician and researcher to understand how best to use the information to improve patient outcomes and the impact of clinical research.

According to the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of American adults receive their news from social media. In a similar regard, members of the public, including your patients, may only be getting their scientific information from these platforms and from their “followers” and/or friends. Perhaps the best way to get correct information to the lay population is through engagement. This will assist in reducing the impact of “echo-chambers” where misinformed beliefs regarding health care and the larger scientific community may be propagated. Although engaging the public in an open, unmoderated forum may seem scary, this conversation can lead to new innovations in research and clinical outcomes.

How can social media inform everyday patient care? Remember the three-legged stool of evidence-based practice includes the best research available, clinical expertise and patient values. What better way to learn about what patients value than when they are openly offering their opinion on the latest and greatest health care trends? Therefore, engaging patients can not only have an important impact on their misconceptions, but also inform you, the expert, on what those patients value.

From a tangible perspective, understanding who is reading your work and what your relative impact is may also help improve your connectivity to the patients whose health care you are attempting to improve. For example, as of May 15, 2018, according to compiled openly available Altmetric statistics, which track research and social media impact, the *Athletic Training & Sports Health Care* January/February 2018 issue's social media Twitter engagement was approximately 85% members of the public versus 15% identified as a practitioner or scientist. I certainly found this surprising because I hypothesized it would skew in the opposite direction, with a majority...
of retweets coming from scientists! Clearly it is not just other researchers reading your work in the journal!

The one issue with social media is its impulsivity and fleeting nature, which certainly has an impact on research dissemination. As you can imagine, the influence of social media for research circulation is primarily limited to the initial date of online publication, with the highest social media impact occurring within the first 30 days of online release. However, a recent investigation has found that the amount of social media impact (retweets and online engagement) an article has in the first 3 days is highly correlated to citation counts.

Although it is difficult to condense all you want to say to the world about your study into 140 to 280 characters, make sure it is attention grabbing, include a link to the article, and tweet early and often. The lesson learned is the more reach you can have with your article, the more influence your scientific information can have on both the lay population and the scientific and clinical communities!

REFERENCES