Becoming a Public Thought Leader in 140 Characters or Less
How Nurses Can Use Social Media as a Platform

There is no more important time than now for nurses to talk about what we know and care about: health care and science. We have a new president in the White House and a health care repeal (Trumpcare) of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) that has passed the House and currently is in the Senate. Research funding from the National Institutes of Health have been cut, and scientists who study the environment have been curtailed. It's not just politicians who affect policy—it’s people like you and me. As nurses and experts in our field, we all have the potential to influence the public and policy. We have credibility and authority because of our credentials and professional work with individuals in need. In this editorial, director of marketing and brand strategist Rebecca Darmoc, and I, provide a primer on how to engage with the public by sharing what you know on the online platform Twitter®.

THE SOCIAL EFFECT
But first, what does it mean to be a public thought leader? Becoming a public thought leader may not be something that you have ever thought about or aspired to become. Simply going to work and doing the best that you can while there may seem like enough. In online communications, we trust individuals more than brands, and we engage with individuals more than brands (Nielsen, 2015). This shift offers an opportunity for nurses, academics, educators, and researchers to become publishers of our own content. We can create awareness by simply expressing our knowledge online. It is a quick and easy way to start to engage in public conversations—to share ideas and become a trusted source of information that brings value to others. Taking these actions is what is called being “an influencer” in social media talk. We believe that getting active on Twitter is the first step.

POWER OF TWITTER
Twitter has influenced society because of its design—the speed of sharing and notifying, the hashtag (#) function for specific searching of topics, and the 313 million active monthly users (Twitter, 2016). It is international and accessible to anyone with internet access. Twitter has been used successfully to start revolutions (e.g., the pro-democracy uprising in Egypt) and social justice movements (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter), to demand corporate accountability (e.g., how overbooked flights are handled by United Airlines and about EpiPen® pricing by manufacturer Mylan Pharmaceuticals), to promote and clarify the work and image of nurses (#ShowMeYourStethoscope), and to fight for quality and safety in our hospitals (#NursesTakeDC, #NursePatientRatiosNow). It has been used to fight stereotypes and expose scandals involving public figures (e.g., Bill O’Reilly at Fox News). These examples show us how individuals, public figures, governments, and corporations are merged through Twitter around social and political issues. Social media and Twitter generate activism, outrage, fear, crisis communications, and a demand for change. But Twitter can also be useful in less dramatic, but important ways.

Twitter has become an influencer marketplace. Almost every industry has a presence where organizations and professionals are sharing information with each other and the public. In addition to networking at conferences every year, Twitter provides an instant...
line of communication to health care communities and an opportunity to influence regardless of location. In 2014, Stanford University commissioned a global study that identified approximately 100,000 health care professionals on Twitter, who were actively networking with an average of 300,000 tweets per day (Creation Healthcare, 2014). Of the 10 categories of health care professions analyzed, nurses comprised the majority of users and tweeted more often than any other category. This number has continued to grow over the past 3 years (Creation Healthcare, 2014). Joining this Twitter community will add another layer to your reputation as a nursing thought leader.

Twitter helps articulate the meaning of your work in an easily digestible manner. Your nursing expertise becomes accessible beyond the walls of your hospital, health center, or university; academic journals; and higher education institutions. Your practical, real-life knowledge or your research findings or insights on current issues are available for the public, who are ultimately the people you are trying to help.

In addition to other nurses, health care professionals, or academics, active Twitter use can harness attention from some more traditional media sources. For example, 25% of verified Twitter accounts belong to journalists who search the site for story ideas and sources. For example, 25% of verified Twitter accounts belong to journalists who search the site for story ideas and sources. The modern news consumer. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/

You can start by writing down the words to highlight in your Twitter profile. A carefully crafted, descriptive profile increases search visibility for journalists and peers who are looking for experts to weigh in on particular topics, such as health care access, insurance, and pre-existing conditions.

Your personal brand should guide your online activities. Everything you share should resonate with your audience and align with your goals for thought leadership. Leave a positive and memorable impression. Most importantly, provide something valuable.

THE TIME IS NOW

For those of you who are brand new to this, you can start by taking 3 minutes to open a Twitter account and then follow people and accounts of interest such as your employer, coworkers, news outlets, etc. (e.g., @JPNJournal, @AmerPsychNurses, @MonaShattell, @BecDarmoc). Following other thought leaders will get you up to speed on conversations in your professional community. For those with Twitter accounts who may not be active users, start by retweeting content that you resonate with or like, and then share some of your own thoughts. Exploring and sharing for 5 minutes each day is more effective than spending 1 hour every few weeks.

For those of you who are more experienced active Twitter users, create content about what’s important to you. You have a lot of experience in health care that the public can benefit from hearing about (just be sure you are aware of HIPAA and relevant social media policies in your workplace). I hope you weigh in. There are many people who are weighing in who have a lot less real-life knowledge. As nurses, patients need our unique perspective to lead and advocate for them, now more than ever. Help change the world, one Tweet at a time.

REFERENCES

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