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Disrupting Medical Education by Redefining “Social Media”



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The term “social media” isn’t exactly inspirational to many doctors. It can conjure distasteful scenarios of time-wasting, insignificant social interaction; self-promotion; privacy issues; and the absence of the “peer-review” stamp of approval.

As doctors begin to grapple with the adoption of social media as a complement to the traditional office visit or curbside consult, attempting to rally the reluctant physician to join the information revolution will remain a herculean effort until we redefine “social media.”

MedEd, Free and Open

This is exactly what I and my colleagues have undertaken with [FOAMed](#). Instead of asking doctors to use “social media” to connect with other doctors, leaving them with visions of HIPAA breaches and lawsuits galore, we’ve clarified our efforts as [Free Open Access Medical Education](#), with encouraging results.

FOAMed ([#FOAMed](#) on Twitter) is effectively an umbrella term to define the concept of harnessing the combination of interested practitioners with rapidly evolving technology in the setting of increasingly accessible broadband to create a network of Free Open Access Medical Education resources.

There is no governing body. FOAMed belongs to those practitioners who wish to use it in online (and now offline) conversation. It is not accredited, it is not peer reviewed – it is merely managed, populated and curated by the people involved in the conversation. It is a way of sharing education resources – new blogs, vodcasts, programs etc It is a way of asking questions pertinent to medical education, research, best practice and guidelines. It is a way of bringing the global medical community together. (You can find examples on [my website](#).)

Of course, FOAMed is not an entirely new concept. We didn’t reinvent the wheel or cure world hunger. But what we did was start the conversation by convincing the previously dormant and disinterested altruists that a bigger stage and eager minds were waiting to read, listen to and embrace their thoughts, ideas and visions.

Share, Discuss and Learn, Socially

Where I had witnessed a muted response to my 5+ years of “social media and medicine” promotion, the response to FOAMed has proven positive and engaged. Physicians are now vocal advocates of the concept, and encouraged by its popularity, I have built the Global Medical Education Project, (GMEP, [gmep.org](#)) a platform for the exchange of medical questions and answers which integrates all the sites which put the “social” in social media (Twitter, Facebook, and the like).

The site is an asynchronous learning platform which allows the free sharing of high quality media and the ability to host these images/videos/questions on blogs and websites (via a plugin); then share this media via the current social media channels. On GMEP, users can pose a question, including relevant media (images, diagnostics, etc) and relevant multiple choice answers, references, commentary and debate.

This is where I see the future of FOAMed and of the way we as doctors learn and collaborate – an open access, global, free, useful, wisdom-of-crowds, reviewed, contextual learning environment. We won’t call it “social media,” but rather sharing, discussing and learning, socially. :)

Jan 3, 2013 10:01 am

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