

9-1-2013

Did you know?

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Recommended Citation

Halevi, Gali Dr (2013) "Did you know?," *Research Trends*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 34 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://www.researchtrends.com/researchtrends/vol1/iss34/8>

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Section 7: Did you know?

...About physicians on Twitter?

Dr. Gali Halevi, Elsevier

Did you know that there are over 1000 medical doctors actively participating in TwitterDoctors.net, a directory of physicians on Twitter?

Some of the participating physicians tweet their professional comments on health and medical issues, report breaking news and research, and inspire patients, thus reaching out in some cases to thousands of followers. However, this phenomenon has its issues. A recent analysis of physicians on Twitter (1) studied 260 self-identified physicians who all had at least 500 followers on Twitter, and found that 144 tweets (3%) were categorized as unprofessional. 38 tweets (0.7%) represented potential patient privacy violations, 33 (0.6%) contained profanity, 14 (0.3%) included sexually explicit material, and 4 (0.1%) included discriminatory statements. This study shows a relatively small proportion of unprofessional behavior overall, which thanks to social media can be quantitatively monitored. However, it is impossible to tell if and how the social networking element increased the behaviors' frequency and their outreach, compared to what these would have been in a previous era. Social networking monitoring represents an opportunity to help identify unprofessional behaviors and address them, perhaps through the education of physicians on what is and is not acceptable. This could help the Twitter directory achieve better stimulation of the patient-doctor discourse.

References:

1. Physicians on Twitter: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=893850>