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Mingling at the Cocktail Party

An article that is tweeted repeatedly is 11 times more likely to be cited than an article with fewer tweets [1]. Another study shows that an article shared through various social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn) boosted website visits to the article versus minimal visits with no social media shares [2]. As a healthcare professional, having a social media presence can be very powerful in helping people learn about your work and your expertise and in helping you learn about the latest research and policies related to your specialty. Here are some statistics showing who's on social media and what they are using it for [3]:

- 2.65 billion people worldwide
- 70% of Americans
- 33% of patients search online for information about treatments
- 80% of doctors, with about half of them using social media for professional purposes

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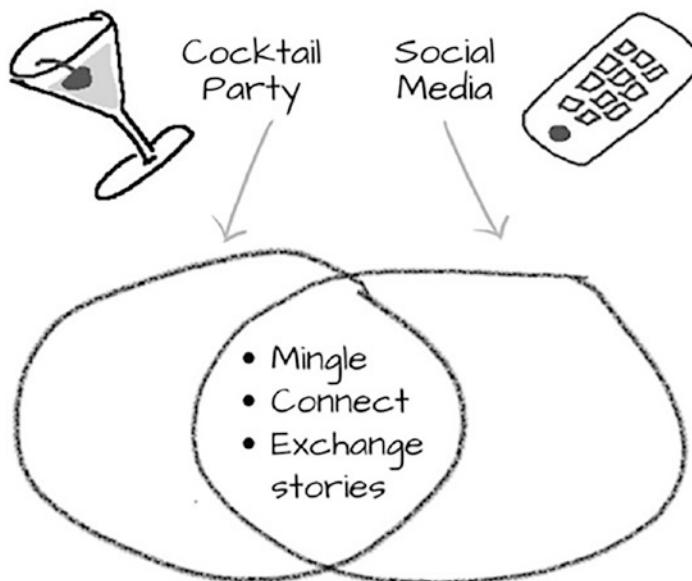
P. M. Garrett, K. Yoon-Flannery (eds.), *A Pediatrician's Path*,
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Go to where the people are hanging out. Join the giant, world-wide cocktail party.

- *Do you hear someone saying they heard from a friend of a friend that their daughter had a reaction from the HPV vaccine?* Join the conversation to share safety data from a study or your own blog post about dispelling common myths about the HPV vaccine.
- *Was there some huge update that you want everyone to know about, like how the HPV vaccine used to be three doses and is now just as effective in two doses for certain ages?* Start a conversation about it by sharing a graphic from the CDC or your own article on HPV vaccine updates.
- *Did you do research on HPV vaccine rates in your practice?* Start a conversation to tell other doctors about it by sharing your publication link and by inviting podcast hosts and magazine writers to interview you about it.
- *Do you see people dancing?* Walk toward them and share your moves!

The reasons to engage in social media are plenty. You can share evidence-based information with other doctors or with people who are like your patients. You can learn from other doctors about their research or about highlights from conferences you can't attend in person. You can exchange stories about experiences you have had first hand and stories from patients. You can also find mentors and connect with people who may end up inviting you to be a speaker or to collaborate on a project together. Let's break down the steps on how to start to mingle and how to curate a network that can help you move your career forward.



Create Your Online Footprint

Have you ever searched your name on the internet? Try it. What are the first ten results? How much of those results are content created *by you* versus a profile assembled *for you* by a health company? Here's the thing. Patients, potential collaborators, potential employers, and many others will Google you. Make it easy for people to find you. Be in control of what is written about you by creating your own footprint. Be patient, because this process takes time and your approach may evolve over time, too, but the key point is to just get started.

Pick three to five main medical topics and two to three fun topics you want to post about often. When you create profiles on platforms like LinkedIn, Doximity, your practice website, or Twitter, mention these interests. Share articles, infographics, and tips related to these areas. Mention to everyone you talk to that these are the topics that you are passionate about. If a news reporter asked your practice or communications manager who to interview about those topics, that manager should be able to reflexively respond with your name. Eventually, as you write and speak about them, search engines will also reflexively respond with your name attached to these topics.

Platforms and Purpose

So where is this cocktail party? It's actually happening in a few places all at once, but you don't have to be omnipresent. Pick one or two platforms to explore. Get accustomed to the language (e.g., hashtags), the other guests (who do you want to follow, who should you report and block?), and the flow of the space. Take time to make new friends there. Chances are they can be your friends when you are ready to try out other platforms, too. You may already have a personal TikTok or Instagram account, but I recommend starting on Twitter to start making professional connections. Once you are comfortable, you can also make profiles in your hospital system's directory, Doximity, Pinterest, TikTok, or Instagram.

Let's review how we can be an ace at the cocktail party. We will use the ACE mnemonic which stands for Advocate, Collaborate, and Educate. These activities provide a framework for how to be intentional in making connections, starting and joining conversations, and finding friends and an audience on these platforms.

A Advocate 

C Collaborate 

E Educate 

- Advocate
 - Share which congressional bills can better serve your patients.
 - Connect with key stakeholders and legislators.
 - Share stories of how patients are affected by policies.
- Collaborate
 - Meet mentors, mentees, and sponsors.
 - Find partners to work with on writing, advocacy, or research projects.
 - Get invited to conferences and hospitals to speak on your area of expertise.

- Educate
 - Share research findings and news on three to five core topics.
 - Learn from patients sharing their stories.
 - Learn from other healthcare workers anywhere in the world.

Connect and Engage

So, if social media is a cocktail party, what should you wear? Posting content is like getting dressed. You wouldn't leave home naked, right? Well then, don't start approaching people at the party before you have put on some clothes (i.e., content). People will be more likely to follow you if they are able to get a sense of your background and personality.

Take a few photos of yourself and a few photos of random things that mean something to you, such as a coffee mug, a special pen, a yummy meal, or an interesting book you are reading. Pick one of the photos of yourself and upload it to your profile. Post interesting facts that you learned from grand rounds or a study question. Share the latest data and studies on one of your core topics.

Finally, connect! Search for people in your field and search for people who inspire you. Follow them. Search for #hashtags (phrases without spaces preceded by the "#" sign which allows them to be searchable) for more interesting people to follow. Some examples are #medtwitter, #womeninmedicine, #tweetiatrician, and #meded. If you enjoy positivity, you can also search for #gratitude, #mindset, or #kindness. You can also follow hospital systems and specialty organizations.

Is following people all we have to do to make friends at the party? No! You can't just walk around and follow people. You have to also talk to them. Engage in the conversation by liking and replying to intriguing posts or questions. You can also share posts. On Twitter, sharing is also known as "retweeting." When you "quote retweet" on Twitter, you are sharing someone's post but also adding your own thoughts that you feel are kind of important. Don't do this too often, because it detracts from the original person's post. Let other people speak and show up on your timeline

(list of your posts or shares). Be mindful to share or retweet content from a diverse crowd. Share the dance floor with others.

Now, how cool would it be if we could all party at the same time, instead of having broken up conversations? That's basically what a "Twitter chat" is. On a predetermined date and time, one account will post questions every 10 to 15 minutes for 1 hour. People will respond to those questions and comment on each other's posts. This is a great way to find and connect with people in real time. You can find chats by searching (e.g., "hospitalist chat") or by asking in a post (e.g., "Which chats should I follow on hospital medicine?") or by messaging someone with similar interests for recommendations.

Etiquette

The most important rule to remember when using social media as a healthcare professional is, of course, complying with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). A good test of whether or not a post complies with HIPAA is asking yourself if you would feel comfortable sharing this at a cocktail party where everyone is invited or on a crowded elevator. If you do share, avoid exposing patient identifiers by altering as many details as you can, such as the date of encounter, age, and physical and personality features.

Another question to determine if something is appropriate to share is to ask what purpose does this post/photo serve? For example, even if a patient allows a photo to be taken and no identifying features are exposed, consider if it truly adds a lot of educational value. Is this type of photo not available in a book or journal? And if not, consider publishing it instead of posting it. Let's also consider a celebratory post about a champagne tap or being right about diagnosing a rare cancer. What educational value does that add? While our achievements should be recognized, consider that it may also be the reason for a family's suffering. It is probably best to share these victories with your in-real-life circle. Lastly, be aware of your employer's social media usage guidelines. Many of these tips probably also align with company policies.

Here are two of my rhymes to finish off this section on how to behave on social media.

“Think twice, tweet nice.” –Joannie Yeh MD

Be kind. Intentions are difficult to interpret without visual cues, sometimes without context. Assume good intent and move on. Add kind words if you have them. Still, people might attack. They are called trolls. They lose power when they are ignored. Don’t feel like you need to write something back if you don’t want to. It’s okay to respond with silence. It’s okay to respond by blocking them. Save yourself from drama. Focus on where you can add value.

“Check the source before you endorse.” –Joannie Yeh MD

There’s a lot of information on the internet. Some of it looks very enticing and curious. Be careful what you share. Do the research. Read the full article before sharing it. As healthcare professionals, one of our purposes on social media is to increase public awareness of data and stories that help that data make sense to the lay public. Let’s not confuse people by inadvertently sharing a click-bait article that may sound good but skews data to fit a sensationalized and dishonest narrative. Also, check a person’s profile before you follow them or share their content.

Despite your best intentions, there will also be shady characters on social media that are relentlessly mean, persistently posting false information, or inappropriate. Feel free to utilize the block and report options for these accounts. Protect your time, because you have other projects to get to, such as the writing and speaking assignments (see next section).

Writing, Speaking and Beyond

The social media platforms can only help you do so much to network and connect with others. If you want to get a larger audience and reach or if you want to write longer posts about the topics you establish an expertise in, here are a few outlets to explore. You can

guest post on someone's blog or start your own. This is a great way to just practice writing about your core topics and finding your style. You can submit articles to physician platforms like KevinMD and Doximity. You can also talk about your topics as a guest or host on a podcast.

To reach nonmedical audiences, consider working with your employer's communications manager to explore opportunities to be interviewed by local news channels, radio shows, and magazines. Another option is to submit a letter to the editor or op-ed to a newspaper to share your opinion about a recent article or event. Check individual newspaper websites for their submission guidelines. The Help A Reporter Out (HARO) website is another way to share your voice. It is an online tool that connects you to a reporter when they are looking for a quote from someone with your specific expertise.

Final Thoughts

Keep your engagement consistent and mind your boundaries. When you first start, make a schedule for when to post and interact, so you don't feel so lost trying to figure out who to talk to and which hashtags to use. Maybe just 10 minutes once a day. Remember, be patient. Just like how you usually don't become best friends with people you meet for the first time at a cocktail party, making friends and developing meaningful connections on social media is a gradual process. Over time, using the ACE purposes and profile suggestions, you will find your people and they will find you.

As you build and find your community, also be empowered to say no if you don't want to connect with someone or if you don't have time to answer private messages. Trolls on social media, incessant flow of the news, or events in your own life can make hanging out on social media not helpful or healthy for you. It's okay to take a break (as I take a 1-month break from Twitter while writing this chapter). Decide on your boundaries without apology.

Social media is an amazing cocktail party where you can be inspired by people from all over the world and have the chance to inspire others. I'll see you out there on the dance floor.

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