Patient Perceptions of Social Media Use by Orthopaedic Surgeons: Comparing Responses Across the US

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BACKGROUND: Social medial (SM) utilization by orthopedic surgeons is becoming increasingly common, but it is not clear how patients perceive content posted by physicians. A recent pilot study involving patients from a single institution identified high SM usage trends for healthcare information, as well as detailed how patients perceive SM content. Even with this literature, larger studies across multiple regions/institutions are still lacking, thus making the findings less generalizable to patient populations.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to characterize content posted by orthopedic surgeons on SM while investigating patient perceptions of this content from various institutions across different regions of the United States. We analyzed how this content may influence the respondents' healthcare decisions.

METHODS: SM posts by orthopedic surgeons were reviewed and categorized. A patient survey was written to assess respondent SM usage practices and respondent perceptions of these categories. The survey was administered in the clinics of 13 separate orthopedic surgeons via QR code. Survey results were analyzed for differences in SM utilization. Patient responses were assessed to judge perception of SM content types.

RESULTS: There were 636 completed patient surveys. SM utilization was high with at least 60.1% of patients in each age group reporting weekly or daily usage. 31% of patients reported using SM to see information about their healthcare at least once per month, 44% of patients reported reviewing the SM account of a physician at least a few times a year, and 26% of patients reported that they were likely or very likely to view the SM account of their own physician. 29% of patients noted that SM content is likely or very likely to influence which physician they see. Patients held consistently positive view of posts involving education on common injuries, sports team coverage, patient testimonials, and example images used to diagnose and treat patients. Patients held consistently neutral views of posts educating colleagues, discussing research, displaying surgeons' personal lives, and supporting marginalized groups. Several post categories elicited negative or highly polarized responses including those showing surgical techniques, pictures/videos taken during surgery, or political statements.

CONCLUSION: SM is an increasingly useful tool to help physicians interact with patients or build a practice. Physicians who wish to interact with patients should consider posting content viewed most positively, while posting content viewed less favorably sparingly or with a sensitive tag. The most effective way to reach large patient populations appears to be through Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and LinkedIn, in that order. Further ongoing study is required to understand the differences between physician SM content focused on interacting with patients compared to content focused on interacting with other physicians.