Plastic Surgery-Related Hashtag Utilization on Instagram and Implications for Education and Marketing

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INTRODUCTION: Recent data suggests 42 percent of surgeons report their patients are seeking aesthetic surgery to improve their appearance on Instagram and other social media.1 Despite the rising influence of Instagram in plastic surgery, few academic publications address Instagram, let alone evaluate its utilization in plastic surgery. We thus set out to systematically answer the following two questions: 1) what plastic surgery-related content is being posted to Instagram, and 2) who is posting this content?

METHODS: Twenty-one Instagram plastic surgery related hashtags were queried. Content analysis was used to qualitatively evaluate each of the nine “top” posts associated with each hashtag (189 posts). Duplicate posts and those not relevant to plastic surgery were excluded.

RESULTS: A total of 1,789,270 posts utilized the twenty-one hashtags sampled in this study. Of the top 189 posts for these 21 queried hashtags, 163 posts met inclusion criteria.

American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS) and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) board certified plastic surgeons accounted for only 17.8% of top posts (29 posts), whereas those not board certified by ABPS or RCPSC accounted for 26.4% (43 posts). Excluding foreign surgeons, otolaryngologists made up the largest group of non-ABPS or RCPSC board certified surgeons, with 7.4% of top posts (12 posts). Also included in this cohort were dermatologists (9 posts), general surgeons (6 posts), gynecologists (4 posts), family medicine physicians (2 posts), and an emergency medicine physician (1 post). All of these non-plastic surgery trained physicians marketed themselves as “cosmetic surgeons”. Nine of these top posts (5.5%) were by non-physicians. This included dentists (4 posts), spas with no associated physician (4 posts), and a hair salon (one post). The majority of these posts were for self-promotional (94 posts, 67.1%) as opposed to educational (46 posts, 32.9%) purposes. Board certified plastic surgeons were significantly more likely to post educational content to Instagram as compared to non-plastic surgeons (62.1% vs. 38.1%, p = .02).

CONCLUSION: ASPS board eligible and board-certified plastic surgeons are underrepresented amongst physicians posting top plastic surgery-related content to Instagram. Given that the increasing number of non-plastic surgeons performing cosmetic procedures may come at the expense of patient safety and outcomes,2–4 our findings as mentioned here present a possible cause for concern.

Reference Citations:
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Ethics and Professionalism with Snapchat Use in Plastic Surgery

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INTRODUCTION: Ethical and professional concerns have been raised with live broadcasts of plastic surgery on new social media platforms like Snapchat. Many surgeons have since called for the development of more structured oversight in this area.1–3 We therefore preformed a systematic
review of what is, in fact, known about such ethical and professional implications and conducted an ethical analysis of these issues.

METHODS: MEDLINE was queried using the terms: “plastic surgeon”, “plastic surgery”, “social media”, “ethics”, “professionalism”, and “snapchat”. Abstract review of all articles was performed. For the ethics analysis, the four principles of medical ethics (4P) were used. The 4P’s include: 1) patient autonomy, 2) beneficence, 3) nonmaleficence, and 4) justice. Related principles include disclosure and informed consent.

RESULTS: Initial search yielded 87 articles, of which 34 articles met final inclusion criteria that were relevant to social media use in plastic surgery. No peer-reviewed articles were found that discussed the social media application of Snapchat, nor were there any articles that addressed the ethical and professional implications of sharing plastic surgery videos live on social media platforms. While entertainment itself is not per-se unethical and has its role if done tactfully, there are concerns of trivializing situations where patients are under anesthesia and are at risk of serious harm. Increasingly greater opportunities for patient harm exist as one progresses from primary (used directly for patient care) to tertiary (widely accessible social media) uses of patient visual and audio recordings - among tertiary uses, this risk further increases with minimally edited live posts. The surgeon risks little potential self-harm unless there is a breach in patient confidentiality or videos are posted without consent, which can result in litigation. Meanwhile, patients risk their images being copied, manipulated, and redistributed, as well as possible revelation of their identity. The patient may carry the unequal risk burden.

CONCLUSION: Though the ethics are questionable for certain aspects of sharing live videos of plastic surgery on social media, these issues remain largely unexamined in the literature. Further inquiry and discussion is warranted with the aim of upholding the highest level of professionalism with the use of novel social media platforms in plastic surgery.

Reference Citations:
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