

Docs on TikTok: The risks and benefits physicians experience on social media.

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Abstract

Background: The social media application TikTok has quickly gained popularity, with over 1.1 billion users worldwide after only two years. There is a growing community of physicians and other healthcare workers posting videos on the application, serving as an additional avenue to enhance medical education, improve patient care, and expand career opportunities. Given the limited literature on the physician experience creating content on social media, there is little guidance for physicians interested in developing medical social media accounts. Our objective is to gain insight into the experiences of physician “TikTok-ers,” while delineating potential risks and benefits to healthcare recognized during their own social media engagement.

Methods: We developed a questionnaire assessing career impact, risks, and benefits identified by DO and MD physicians with over ten thousand followers on TikTok. The questionnaire was distributed via the physicians’ social media accounts and the data was analysed, classifying themes connecting common experiences.

Results: Overall there were 55 physicians who completed the questionnaire across 20 unique specialties. Approximately 24% of the respondents report creating medical content on social media for less than one year, with over 75% for fewer than five years. 76% of physicians viewed TikTok having positive impacts on the medical field with benefits including opportunities in education, community engagement, creative outlet discovery, and patient empowerment. An overall net-negative impact of TikTok on healthcare was reported by 2%. The risks identified by the surveyed physicians included potential HIPAA violations, professionalism concerns, controversial medical data, and blurred patient boundaries. The remaining 22% saw no overall impact on medicine. There was a statistically significant difference in which the benefit of being on TikTok was on average greater than the risks associated with participation ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Physicians are making their presence known on social media, and TikTok provides no exception. This has created additional opportunities to beneficially engage with an online, patient-based audience. According to surveyed physicians, the benefits provided a stronger positive impact on their careers when compared with risks, thus paving ways in which near unanimous social media use in the community can help foster physician-patient relationships. This suggests social media platforms may provide physicians innovative ways to educate, learn, and improve the quality of medical care delivered.

Keywords: social media; TikTok; medical education; professionalism.