Social Media and Neuropathology: Getting Started and Getting Involved

Introduction

Social media usage among pathologists has become increasingly prevalent and offers opportunities to network with colleagues, share and learn from clinical cases, and stay up to date on the literature. Additionally, social media is free to use and available worldwide, allowing for international interaction among professionals, trainees, and those interested in pathology.

The most popular social media platforms for pathology are Facebook and Twitter. Both have their strengths and weaknesses for the sharing of pathology content:

* Facebook
  + Pros
    - Wide international audience
    - Groups devoted to specific topics in pathology such as neuropathology, surgical pathology, soft tissue, and more
  + Cons
    - Some like to keep personal and professional profiles separate, which is harder to do on Facebook than Twitter
* Twitter
  + Pros
    - Most popular platform among pathologists in the United States
    - Easy to have both professional and personal profiles
    - Professional interaction is common and well-established
  + Cons
    - Limited to 280 characters per tweet

There are ample opportunities to learn, post, and interact on both Facebook and Twitter, and many pathologists use both platforms. In this article, we will provide a short guide on how to get involved and become successful in social media as well as provide additional resources that will be useful to those interested in pathology in social media.

How to Get Started

The first step is to create a social media account, which can be done by following instructions at the following links:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/signup>

It is highly recommended that you choose a professional profile picture with your face clearly visible when creating an account. After an account is created, it’s time to get involved.

How to Get Involved

On Facebook, most pathology content sharing is done through groups, with the most active group in neuropathology being [Surgical Neuropathology](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1464302503855097/?ref=bookmarks). To join, a request for membership will need to be approved by an administrator. This approval typically takes a few days.

In addition to groups, organizations have pages that can be liked or followed such as the [AANP Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/aanpneuropathology/) . Liking and following such pages will allow for content from the corresponding page to show up on your newsfeed.

On Twitter, it is important to interact and network with others. We recommend following [our account](https://twitter.com/neuropathology) as well as finding others to follow through the list of accounts we follow and accounts that follow us. Make sure to follow many different pathologists and neuropathologists to expand your network as following others will often prompt a reciprocal follow of your account.

How to Interact

Within Facebook groups such as Surgical Neuropathology, many professionals around the world share cases asking for input and guidance. This can be very helpful in an international setting where access to resources or board certified neuropathologists may be limited. Generally, it is advisable to offer recommendations rather than definitive diagnoses on these cases. For example, it is better to say “X features are suggestive of Y entity” rather than “this is entity Z.”

Facebook groups and pages also have a wide variety of quizzes and unknowns in which to participate. Feel free to comment and interact as much as you like!

In contrast, Twitter rarely has cases that are posted for diagnostic questions. Posts on Twitter often highlight interesting cases, useful diagnostic features, quizzes and unknowns, or links to articles. It is important to interact with others on Twitter to build your Twitter network. Great ways to do this are commenting on unknowns and posting interesting images of your own. Be sure to let other accounts know about your posts using the “@” symbol. For example, if you tag “@neuropathology” in your tweet, we will be alerted to your tweet and will likely retweet your content to others. The hashtag symbol, “#,” can be used to categorize posts to make them easily searchable. For example, using “#neuropath” in your tweet will make it easy for others to find your tweet if they search for neuropathology content using the search term “#neuropath.”

How to Create a Successful Original Content Post

Whether you are on Facebook or Twitter, creating a successful original content post follows the same general formula. First, take a high quality photograph of the entity that you would like to post. Next, consider adding arrows or diagrams to make your image accessible to an audience of varied training. Finally, let people know that you have posted. On Facebook, request to share your post in the Surgical Neuropathology Facebook group. On Twitter, be sure to tag other interested accounts such as the AANP at @neuropathology. We also recommend categorizing your post with #neuropath on Twitter. Don’t be discouraged if your first post does not generate a grand reception. Building followers and trust within the social media sphere takes time and effort. If you continue to provide high quality posts and professionally interact with others, your posts will become increasingly popular.

How to Be Safe

Safety for yourself and patients should always be at the forefront of consideration when making a post. Protect yourself and the patient by never including HIPAA-protected information or patient identifiers such as name, medical record number, exact age, date of birth, identifying image characteristics such as a skin scar, location of the patient, or date of procedure. This list is not exhaustive of patient identifiers but will hopefully give an idea of what type of information should not be included in a post. Below is a fictional example patient and an appropriate description that is safe for social media distribution.

* Example fictional patient history with identifiers
  + John Smith, MR0003838, is a 64-year-old patient with a right frontal lobe lesion that was found to be glioblastoma on June 2, 2015 at Little Rock Hospital.
* Example HIPAA compliant history
  + Patient in 60s presents with a frontal lobe lesion found to be glioblastoma.

If a patient’s condition is so unique as to be identifying within itself, it is best not to post the case immediately, but rather allow several months to pass before posting.

Additional Social Media Platforms

Instagram – Photo and video-sharing social networking service

Linked-In – Primarily used for professional networking

Neuropathology Blog – Foremost social media blog for up-to-date neuropathology news, guidelines, interesting cases, job and fellowship listings, and gossip

PathCast – Features live, interactive lectures by world-renowned pathologists

Additional Resources

Dr. Jerad Gardner has written an excellent article on the Pathology Resident Wiki entitled “[Social Media Guide for Pathologists](http://pathinfo.wikia.com/wiki/Social_Media_Guide_for_Pathologists).” This article provides more detailed information on different social media platforms and usage.

# Further reading on the ethics of social media and pathology can be found in this article by Dr. Genevieve M. Crane and Dr. Jared Gardner entitled [Pathology Image-Sharing on Social Media: Recommendations for Protecting Privacy While Motivating Education](http://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/2016/08/stas1-1608.html?utm_content=buffer69ede&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)