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Using social media for tobacco dependence education

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Aim: This oral presentation will provide participants with information and resources through multi-media and Q & A opportunities. It can also be made into a poster, if necessary.

Background: This project was designed to assess the usage of social media applications by dental school faculty, and identify what professional development might be needed in the use of social media if utilized to compliment tobacco dependence education and treatment efforts. Over the last three years, social media has moved from an uncertain strategy, to a permanent fixture, on to a primary tool in marketing and communication. Social media is also beneficial in higher education and for public health advocacy. Research has suggested that dental students are generally receptive to the educational process on tobacco prevention and treatment, yet only half report routinely implementing the protocol in practice. In recent years, dental educators have made great advances toward the implementation of tobacco dependence education in their curricula, although often the content can be limited. This limitation can result in incomplete tobacco use interventions. In the 2006-07 population survey Tobacco Use Supplement, patients reported only 34.9% of practicing U.S. dentists asked and advised them to quit tobacco. Could social media help bridge this gap in the educational process, as well as address this issue with new practitioners? Social media utilization can encourage questions and conversations to supplement the educational process with health education students and their professors (dental, medical, nursing, pharmacy, public health, etc). Additionally, social media provides real-time support and research has recently shown effectiveness in its application for tobacco dependency treatment.

Methods: Four hundred forty-three full-time dental and dental hygiene faculty from five North American dental schools were invited to complete a 12-item online survey regarding their social media usage during a 30 day period in fall of 2011. Two reminder emails were sent to faculty. Response rate was 50% (N=221). Of the respondents, nearly half were dentists, and 62% were ≥51 years of age. Facebook was the most popular social network and reportedly used by 111 respondents. The most often reported frequency of use was weekly (20.4%, N=221); users indicated doing so primarily for personal rather than professional purposes. However, 37% of respondents reported not using any social media. The most frequently cited barriers to the use of social media were time (48%) and privacy concerns (48%).

Conclusions: There are many tobacco dependency treatment resources available through social networking sites. There is room to increase awareness and professional use of these networks through faculty development and training. Due to the rapid growth in the utilization of such networks by students and society, dental educators should consider exploring the use of social media as an adjunct in teaching tobacco dependence treatment. Use of social media by practicing dentists could serve as an enhancement to treatment and help supplement the incompleteness of tobacco use interventions previously identified.