ANAESTHETIC TWITTER FOR BEGINNERS

WHAT IS TWITTER?
Twitter is a social media platform where users share their thoughts, expertise and resources in tweets of 280 characters or less. It is a news and social networking service where anyone can join and see what others write (unless set to private). Users ‘follow’ other users who are of interest to them.

WHY TWEET?
Twitter can be a great place to keep up to date with breaking news, latest anaesthetic controversies and real time discussion. Social media addresses our increasing need for immediacy. It’s not uncommon for a news story to break on Twitter and then be picked up by mainstream media days later. In medicine, Twitter can be used to announce new research, techniques or safety alerts. Tweeting with colleagues can stimulate further reading and discussion. Peer review of scientific literature and bedside practice is frank, immediate and often lightened with humour. Where else can you have an international multi-disciplinary debate about which Star Wars character would be the most difficult to intubate?

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A professional account allows the sharing of information and networking with others. Conversations can traverse specialties and geography, enriching learning. Live tweeting during conferences is a way of focusing the attendee’s attention by writing tweets which act as notes, and provides the added benefit of allowing those at home to follow the conference. It connects the on-site community and allows the inclusion of distant participants.

Official accounts from scientific journals such as Anaesthesia (@Anaes_Journal) have vibrant and interesting content. Novel content dissemination strategies include ‘free for a day’ papers and ‘tweetchat’ – an online journal club where authors and editors make themselves available to answer questions from anyone on Twitter. Participants follow the discussion using the allocated hashtag.

Twitter allows dismantling of usual hierarchical structures. I have had meaningful direct engagement with politicians, medical experts, professional
colleges and celebrities. Reciprocally, it allows those in power to have direct access to the community without the usual layers of bureaucracy – the ultimate ear to the ground. Access to free medical education on social media is of particular importance to health care professionals in low to middle income countries where conference fees can be prohibitive.

Doctors and medical students experience adverse mental health at alarming rates. Social media can provide a sense of community despite the geographic and craft group diversity. Twitter can provide psychological safety where users can be free to be authentic away from their workplace. Many reach out after-hours during moments of personal and professional difficulty. The support is available at all hours and is given genuinely and generously.

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SAFETY FIRST

Users who identify as health care professionals are required to abide by social media policies set by their employers, regulatory authorities and professional bodies. All policies include obligations to respect patient confidentiality, maintain appropriate patient-doctor boundaries and be professional. Anaesthetists should be mindful that some social media platforms are public (Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube) and others can be set to private (Facebook). Regardless of level of privacy settings, every post can be captured by screenshot and shared across social media platforms. Individual tweets can be lifted out of context. Be particularly mindful when posting pictures to avoid the inadvertent inclusion of identifying features in the background which can be seen when magnified.

**TWITTER LANGUAGE**

- **Handle**: Your username (mine is @GongGasGirl).
- **Tweet**: A 280 character message.
- **Retweet**: A share of someone else’s tweet which then appears on your feed.
- **Feed**: The tweets which appear on your homepage. It consists of your tweets, and other peoples tweets you have shared.
- **Mention (@)**: A way to include another user’s handle in a tweet. The other user is notified of their inclusion.
- **Direct message (DM)**: A private message between two or more people. You can only DM someone who follows you.
- **Hashtag (#)**: A tool which allows filtering to find topics of interest. Followed by a keyword or phrase. Can be created by you or pre-existing.
- **Blue tick after user handle**: Signifies a Twitter verified account. This distinguishes you from fake Madonna accounts. High profile users can apply to have their account verified.

**ANONYMOUS OR REAL**

Accounts can be personal, professional or official. They can be anonymous or real, corporate beige or authentic and colourful. Some users share their personal and professional lives to create an interesting and vibrant online persona (@traumagasdoc). Identifiable accounts tend to be more professionally engaging, particularly when medical topics become contentious. A comment from a known person-doctor boundary.

**TWITTER SET UP**

In order to be part of the conversation, start by creating a profile. There are 330 million Twitter users, your future Twitter community needs a way of finding you. Thoughtful set up will allow more meaningful interaction with others who share your interests. Your handle can simply be your name (@jamesgriffiths) or something more creative which describes you (@scruff888, @ketaminh). Be mindful of your handle length as when others mention (‘@’ you) it consumes some of their 280 characters. In front of the handle you then place a label – some use their name (Tracey Tay or Hellomynames), some use it to further describe their interests (Volatiles are forever).

Your Twitter account can include two pictures. The profile picture is the image other users will see next to your tweets. Some use a professional photo for this (particularly physicians from North America), some use an Avatar, some use a non-identifiable image. The other picture is a header which is seen when others click on your profile.

Create a brief biography which incorporates your interests plus as much personality as you are willing to share. This will be what others see when they click on your handle. Some insert hashtags here (#foamed, #foamgas, #meded) to show their interests and allow others to find them. Many include a disclaimer such as ‘tweets my own’ to differentiate from official use. Further optional details can be included such as location and date of birth.
A hashtag (#NSC19 – the ASA's National Scientific Congress 2019). Entering the hashtag into the search box will locate all tweets which include that hashtag. You can filter them according to ‘top’ – tweets that have been highly engaged with or ‘latest’ showing the most recent tweets first. The community of live tweeters will work hard to summarise, interpret and share content. If you tweet at a conference, remember to include the hashtag so that others can appreciate and respond to your contribution.

By following an anaesthetic conference, you will quickly find other people of interest. You can then branch out to other events which are not familiar to you – this is an easy way to keep up to date with medical advances occurring outside the silo of anaesthesia.

Good luck and have fun on the Twitter train!

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