



# TikTok with the Doc?

## The Social Media Revolution in Healthcare

Text by Dr Suraya Zainul Abidin

“By the way Doc, I follow you on TikTok!” a patient cheerfully mentions as she leaves my consultation room after seeing me for the first time. It is a pleasant ending to an otherwise routine consultation, but it puts a smile on both our faces and instantly elevates our connection.

Social media has seen an exponential rise in the number of active users over the past ten years. More than half of the world (58.4% or 4.6 billion people) are now on social media and spend an average time of two hours and 27 minutes daily on their devices accessing various digital platforms. Facebook leads the way as the most popular social media platform with close to three billion active users, followed by other popular apps such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

Globally, healthcare providers are quickly learning to use social media to connect with their patients, to share information (and combat misinformation), and to stay connected with colleagues worldwide.

My social media journey started during my maternity leave at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020. With nowhere to go and a newborn in my arms, I spent some time exploring TikTok which I had thought was “for the youngsters”. But these social media platforms are so intelligent that they can

discern what content appeals to you, even if you might not consciously realise it yourself. My “FYP” or “For You Page” was filled with videos of various healthcare professionals, with narratives of their work lives, myth-busters, surgical videos, and of course some dance challenges too. Most of the content was light-hearted and easy to digest, presented with catchy music.

Looking at the viewership and comments on these videos made me realise the huge appetite for medically related information from the patient perspective. There is so much that goes on behind the scenes that remains a mystery to our patients: “What goes on in the OT? How is my surgery done? What do the implants look like?” And so began my foray into making TikTok videos – initially with some videos of the surgical instruments I used regularly in the OT and then some snippets of commonly performed orthopaedic procedures.

Information is empowering. The more the patient knows and understands about their condition or the procedure they might be going for, the more involved the patient feels in their care. Most of my consultations last about 15 to 20 minutes. It is hardly enough time to establish rapport, create a connection, explain a medical condition in depth, and check

in with patients about their understanding and concerns.

Social media has given me the opportunity to connect with my patients outside of that short time in the clinic. They get to see what I do on a day-to-day basis and get a glimpse into the “behind the scenes” of the OT – something that is a huge source of anxiety for patients going for surgery.

For me, social media has been a useful tool, but there is a careful balance to tread: abiding by the Personal Data Protection Act is a concern, as is maintaining a professional image of both the profession and the medical institution. I view the use of social media as an alternative way of connecting with my patients, complementing my consultations and interactions with them, and helping my patients to understand more about their care. ♦

Dr Suraya is a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Singapore General Hospital. She has a subspecialty interest in musculoskeletal oncology, and passionately believes in uplifting young women and advocating for women in surgery. She graduated from Imperial College in 2008 and is a mother of four.

