

Tweeting #plasticsurgery—plastic surgeons urged to engage and educate on Twitter

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Twitter has become an important resource for people seeking information about plastic surgery. But only a small percentage of plastic surgery "tweets" consist of evidence-based information posted by credentialed plastic surgeons, according to a report in the December issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the official medical journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

"Twitter provides a great opportunity to engage with and educate patients and the public about [plastic surgery](#)," comments Dr. Olivier Alexandre Branford of The Royal Marsden Hospital, London, lead author of the new article. "But all too often, the conversation is dominated by celebrity gossip and marketing by practitioners who aren't Board-certified [plastic surgeons](#)."

Call to Ensure Expert Plastic Surgery Information on Social Media

The researchers analyzed the sources and types of information about plastic surgery available on Twitter—one of the world's most popular social media platforms. Of nearly 2,900 tweets including the words "plastic surgery," about 70 percent were posted by members of the public. Just six percent of plastic surgery tweets were actually made by plastic surgeons.

A large majority of the Twitter posts were about either celebrity plastic surgery (50 percent) or aesthetic surgery (44 percent). Few provided information about the basic science of plastic surgery, patient safety

issues, or topics related to [reconstructive surgery](#).

More than 60 percent of tweets by plastic surgeons also mentioned aesthetic surgery, while 7.5 percent mentioned celebrity plastic surgery. Posts by plastic surgeons were more likely to mention basic science: 14 percent. Several tweets by plastic surgeons mentioned scientific articles, although only a few included a link to the journal where the article was published.

About five percent of tweets included the #PlasticSurgery hashtag. A hashtag is a label using the pound or hash sign (#) that lets social media users search for messages on a specific topic. Nearly half of tweets tagged #Plastic Surgery were posted by plastic surgeons. A disappointingly high percentage of these posts (37 percent) were self-promotional, however.

"Social media sites are a potentially powerful vehicle of integrating and enhancing education, leading to a useful role in e-learning within plastic surgery," Dr. Branford and coauthors write. They believe that Twitter "may be the best-suited platform to fulfill the role of public education and engagement."

In a series of Twitter surveys, Dr. Branford found that the public wanted plastic surgeons to post about education, patient safety, and new research—not celebrities and self-promotion. The ASPS and its publications play a leading role in building an authoritative plastic surgery presence on Twitter, with accounts including [@DrRodRohrich](#), [@PRSjournal](#), [@ASPS_News](#), and [@ASPSMembers](#). The article includes links to several recent ASPS videos designed to help plastic surgeons build their [social media](#) presence.

"Board-certified plastic surgeons have a great opportunity to promote evidence-based plastic surgery practice via the hashtag #PlasticSurgery

in the interests of supporting patients and the profession," the authors conclude. "As the only real plastic surgeons, we need to reclaim plastic surgery from the tabloid press, celebrity gossip and cosmetic quackery, in the interests of public safety and quality outcomes."

More information: Olivier A. Branford et al. #PlasticSurgery, *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* (2016). [DOI: 10.1097/PRS.0000000000002814](https://doi.org/10.1097/PRS.0000000000002814)

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