

Correspondence

Edited by Kiriakos Xenitidis and Colin Campbell

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Using #newpower in social media for better health

I am pleased to see Harrison *et al*¹ discussing the interface between social media and academic publishing and ask where the *BJPsych* should 'strategically place itself'. Many clinicians – including myself – use social media as their main source of access to new publications and its use allows a wider audience to be reached.

The authors give sensible advice for clinicians in public debate on emotive topics. Unfortunately, avoiding argument and accepting differences in opinion do not tend to have a powerful impact on social media.

If *BJPsych* or other academic institutions hope to guide public opinion on scientific and health topics, an understanding of the failings of traditional communication strategies in social media is essential. In their book *#newpower*, Henry Timms and Jeremy Heiman² outline the shifting rules on how public opinion can be formed and shaped in the age of social media. They draw on examples such as recruitment to ISIS and the emergence of the antivaccine (or antivaxxers) movement to show how traditional institutions are failing in their messaging.

Social media is used extensively in quality improvement networks to connect and share knowledge, and help spread innovation. For example the 1 h TweetChat on 20 May 2019 with Hugh McCauley (@HughMcCauley), National Director for Improvement in England, reached an estimated 1.25 million people (according to Twitter analytics).

The #EndPJparalysis campaign has become a global social movement activating a range of healthcare professionals, patients and carers, reducing long hospital stays and has led to new avenues of research being explored.³

Social media can have a positive impact on health care and health. Understanding how it can be used effectively to spread learning, combat misinformation and change minds is essential and we can all be involved in this work.

1 Harrison J, Hayes J, Woollard J and Tracy D. #BJPsych and social media – likes, followers and leading? *Br J Psychiatry* 2019; **214**: 245–7.

2 Timms H and Heimans J. *#newpower: Why Outsiders are Winning, Institutions are Failing, and How the Rest of Us Can Keep Up in the Age of Mass Participation*. Doubleday, 2018.

3 Oliver D. Fighting pyjama paralysis in hospital wards. *Br J Medicine* 2017; **357**: j2096.

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doi:10.1192/bjp.2020.21

Authors' reply

We thank Dr Lyne and colleagues and Dr Johansson for their correspondence regarding our editorial in the May edition of *BJPsych*.¹

We were interested to hear Dr Lyne's experience of running the Twitter account for the *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* (@irish-jourpsych), the research journal of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland. We agree that Twitter facilitates kinetic and fast-paced communication with a significantly broader reach than traditional journal readership. It can allow us to engage the public and raise the profile of research among policymakers, increasing the potential impact on public policy and services. Dr Johansson highlights evidence that social media is able to shape public opinion, inspire and mobilise people – for better or worse. Social media has the potential to bring about change that would benefit our patients and the health service.

The *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* and the *BJPsych* have embarked on social media communication with careful consideration, if not some trepidation. The challenge of representing a consensus opinion within a college or journal, as Dr Lyne and colleagues described, is perhaps one shared with other membership organisations. In addition, debates in mental health often require more nuance than Twitter can provide. Dr Johansson suggests that social media might be more effective if you take an assertive approach. Indeed, politicians who have a confrontational style on Twitter have succeeded in attracting attention and influencing public discourse, drawing both praise and criticism. The Royal College of Psychiatrists will soon release new guidelines on social media for its members. Time will tell how successful the *BJPsych* will be in positioning itself in this brave new world.

Declaration of interest

J.R.H., J.F.H. and D.T. are on the editorial board of the *BJPsych*. D.T. runs its social media arm.

1 Harrison J, Hayes J, Woollard J, Tracy D. #BJPsych and social media – likes, followers and leading? *Br J Psychiatry* 2019; **214**: 245–7.

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doi:10.1192/bjp.2020.22