

## EDITORIAL

---

# The Use of Real-Time Online Updates for Physicians

**Renee Gaudette, John Yarcusko, Muhammad Wasif Saif**

Gastrointestinal Cancers Program, Yale Cancer Center, Yale University School of Medicine.  
New Haven, CT, USA

The way we communicate and receive information increases in speed each year. Our steady reliance on email in the 1990s evolved into the use of text messages in the early part of this decade. Today, our access to a variety of communication tools such as online blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, is greater than ever. Each development improves our links to timely information and keeps us connected and informed on topics of interest. In a time when innovative information is presented daily on the diagnosis, management, and care of our patients, new communication technology has never been so important.

The recent American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting, held in Orlando, FL, USA from May 29<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>, effectively used online networking sites to announce news from the meeting to attendees and interested subscribers in real-time. The meeting posted a continuous stream of updates to Twitter and Facebook to give followers of the ASCO sites instant access to abstracts, video clips, and presentations.

With over 20 million unique users per month, Twitter is often described as a microblog. Its users have the ability to post messages and updates of up to 140

characters in length. While the required brevity of the messages excludes lengthy conversation, the instant updates often provide users with the option to link to additional information. ASCO used this technology successfully throughout the Annual Meeting by providing subscribers headlines with links to full abstracts on new oncology developments and cancer clinical trial outcomes.

Similarly, Facebook, an even larger social networking site, allows users to post messages that are then shared with other members of their online group. The creation of disease-specific physician groups, with members who are interested in the same medical information, could transform the way we network with our colleagues and significantly enhance collaboration on research and clinical care in the coming years.

The use of Twitter and Facebook has grown substantially and original uses for the technology emerge each day. As physicians begin to realize the impact it can have on their relationships with colleagues and their access to new information, we will gain the ability to use social media sites to our advantage.

We can now see the fresh ways real-time information could improve our patient care and clinical knowledge in our practices. Instant information on staging systems, less invasive diagnostic techniques, clinical trial outcomes, newly approved drugs, and supportive care can be of immediate benefit in our practices. And we can only imagine how today's technology will be the stepping stones to tomorrow's communications tools, as we continually develop even more effective ways to care for our patients.

**Key words** Communication; Computer Communication Networks; Congresses as Topic; Internet; Medical Oncology; Physicians; Review

**Correspondence** Muhammad Wasif Saif  
Section of Medical Oncology, Yale University School of Medicine, 333 Cedar Street; FMP:116, New Haven, CT 06520, USA  
Phone: +1-203.737.1875; Fax: +1-203.785.3788  
E-mail: wasif.saif@yale.edu

**Document URL** <http://www.joplink.net/prev/200907/25.html>

---

**Conflict of interest** The authors have no potential conflicts of interest