Engaging Australia’s rural future health leaders: the role of social media

Shannon Nott¹
¹Future Health Leaders, NSW Health

Background: Social media is a tool that has been recently given the ‘approach with caution’ tag by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. The recent release of AHPRA’s preliminary consultation paper on social media policy has caused a significant uproar within the health care ranks with little recognition of the huge benefits that social media can bring. Future Health Leaders is a new organisation in the health advocacy arena in Australia representing health students and early career health professionals (within five years of graduation). One of its key goals is to provide high-level as well as grass-roots facilitation of individuals and organisations to comment on health issues in Australia, as well as promote health programs. This paper will share the lessons learnt from this organisation through its engagement platform with Gen X and Gen Y as well as health organisations across Australia and the world.

Objective: This paper will specifically look at how the rural health care community can utilise social media to its full in engaging our next generation of health leaders in rural and remote Australia. Through this analysis, the paper will showcase best-practice models in the utilisation of social media, particularly in inspiring a new generation of health professionals, as well as engaging with our youth population of patients. The paper will look at the evolving AHPRA social media policy and contrast this with the benefits of social media, especially within the rural context. It will also highlight some pitfalls of social media and ways in which we can upskill graduate professionals in the appropriate use of social media.

Key messages
- Social media is a tool that can be utilised to engage rural Australia future leaders.
- Social media can narrow the professional/patient health information gap, benefiting communities especially in regards to primary prevention of disease.
- Strong and appropriate use of social media can promote rural health to students at university.
- Social media has its pitfalls; however, these are preventable.

Conclusion: This paper will explore how social media can play a significant role in rural health practice as well as how we can use it to engage the next generation of health leaders in rural and remote communities.