

Social media use is ubiquitous among young adults. Young adults with cancer must make important decisions about where, what, and how to share information on social media. Oncology nurses are in a unique position to start conversations about the risks and benefits of social media use. This column aims to review a variety of social media platforms that may be used by young adults with cancer and provide guidance to nurses on initiating open dialogue with young adults about social media usage.

AT A GLANCE

- Social media provides information, interaction, and support to young adults with cancer.
- Young adults with cancer must make important decisions about how to maintain their presence on social media.
- Young adults with cancer may benefit from guidance from oncology nurses about how and what to share on social media.

KEYWORDS

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Social Media

Support for survivors and young adults with cancer

AnnMarie L. Walton, PhD, MPH, RN, OCN®, CHES, Tara A. Albrecht, PhD, RN, ACNP-BC, Lauren Lux, LCSW, and Sheila Judge Santacroce, PhD, RN, CPNP, FAANP

A cancer diagnosis and treatment can change everything, particularly when they occur during young adulthood (i.e., ages 18–29 years) (Arnett, 2012). Young adults with cancer face challenges inherent to living with the disease (Scott, 2016) while accomplishing usual developmental tasks. These tasks include gaining the education and experience needed to join the workforce and establish a career, developing a personal identity and values system, becoming financially and functionally independent from parents, and cultivating social networks and meaningful relationships beyond the family (Arnett, 2012).

Among the decisions young adults make after a cancer diagnosis is whether to maintain their presence on social media (i.e., digital and Internet-based platforms that allow users to create and exchange content [Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010]) or in web communities (i.e., a user-generated platform that allows communication of information, interaction, and collaboration among large audiences, such as within health care [Boulos & Wheeler, 2007; Grajales, Sheps, Ho, Novak-Lauscher, & Eysenbach, 2014]). If young adults decide to maintain their presence, subsequent decisions follow, such as when and what to disclose about their experience with cancer.

Ninety percent of young adults use social media (Perrin, 2015), and the usage of social media by young adults with cancer is likely no different from that of the general population. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and blogs, allow peo-

ple to connect with others and share information about their life, including health concerns. Each of these platforms are part of many young adults' everyday lives (Love & Donovan, 2014; Perales, Drake, Pemmaraju, & Wood, 2016). For young adults with cancer, social media also offers a means to connect with new communities, particularly peers of the same age who know firsthand about living with cancer. Through social media and the Internet, young adults can develop friendships and deepen connections with their peers in the cancer community. Within this virtual community, they can share fears and seek advice about making decisions about treatment, preserving fertility, managing symptoms, disclosing their diagnosis to potential romantic partners, attending school, and working during treatment and survivorship. Therefore, young adults with cancer may feel less socially isolated and more empowered to engage in the management of their illness. Finally, social media allows individuals with cancer to construct an account of their lives that will survive, even if they do not (Scott, 2016).

Along with their many benefits, social media and online support pose risks to users, including young adults with cancer. For example, impulsive dispatches of sensitive health information and personal identifiers can occur in response to intense emotions, without careful reflection on the potential consequences (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2011). Close family members and employers may learn of a young adult's health information online instead of in person. In addition, when young adults, particularly women, become aware