Editorial

The role of social media in menopausal healthcare

Hannah Short

Social Media Editor, *Post Reproductive Health*

I first signed up to Twitter around four years ago. I didn't 'get it' at that point, felt that I was talking at nobody about nothing in particular, and left shortly afterwards. However, a couple of years later, my interest was again piqued when my cousin, a Public Health trainee, announced she used her account largely for work. Cat memes notwithstanding, it wasn't long before I realised that the 'Twittersphere' was actually a great place to keep up-to-date with medical news, have interesting discussions with contemporaries (albeit in bite-sized 140 character chunks) and diversify my professional network. I was soon hooked!

It quickly became apparent that Twitter was also a fantastic medium in which to disseminate accurate (and, sadly, inaccurate) health information to a wider audience and raise awareness of pressing health concerns. Passionate about post-reproductive health, and the unfortunate lack of universal good care out there, I started tweeting about all things menopausal in the vain hope someone was listening. I gained a steady trickle of followers including fellow professionals, journalists, and women struggling to manage their own menopausal symptoms. And, in June 2014, just after I'd attended my first British Menopause Society Conference, Helen Bevan – then Chief of Service Transformation at the NHS Institute of Innovation and Improvement – contacted me.

Helen had noticed my keenness to raise awareness of post-reproductive health issues and asked if I would be interested in launching a more formal social media campaign as part of NHS Change Day 2015. For those who don't know, NHS Change Day is 'a grassroots movement that's about harnessing the collective energy, creativity and ideas of thousands of people to improve the care and wellbeing of people who use health and care services, their families and staff'. This was an opportunity too good to refuse: Cue the #ChangeTheChange campaign!

Together with Natasha North – a friend, and nurse, also passionate about good menopausal healthcare – the aim of #ChangeTheChange was set: to get people talking about menopause, and ask the NHS to recognise post-reproductive health as a priority, not an afterthought.

In the lead up to the launch in March 2015, our official NHS Change Day coordinator, Danielle, put us in contact with Sarah Chapman at Evidently Cochrane. By good fortune, she told us they were launching a blog series on menopause, connecting personal experience with evidence-based medicine, the very same week as NHS Change Day! Working together helped us raise the profile of the campaign and extended our reach enormously.

Ultimately, #ChangeTheChange was an indisputable social media success, with a fantastic response from healthcare professionals, employers (NHS and private sector), and the general public alike. Overriding messages were that talking about menopause remains somewhat taboo, that support is often hard to find for women who need it and that there is still a great need to educate both primary and secondary care clinicians in the area of post-reproductive health. Of course, The British Menopause Society's 'Mind The Gap' campaign was launched in 2014 to address the latter, very important, issue.

As a result of the social media campaign, I was interviewed on local radio, commissioned to write several online blogs – including one for the Guardian – and have contributed to an upcoming health book for 'active women'. #ChangeTheChange also afforded me the fortuitous opportunity to meet with the president of FIGO (International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics). Subsequently, I will now be helping to create patient information leaflets and an animated educational film on menopause and related issues for GLOWM (The Global Library of Women's Medicine). All this stemming from a tweet or two!

So, where are we now? Has the impact of #ChangeTheChange been long lasting, a year and half down the line? What role does social media have in providing information and support surrounding the

West Suffolk Hospital, UK; Bury St Edmunds, UK

Corresponding author:
Hannah Short, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, West Suffolk Hospital, Hardwick Lane, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2QZ, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Email: hannahlouiseshort@gmail.com

menopause? As the newly appointed Social Media Editor for *Post Reproductive Health* (PRH), my intentions must be clear. I am keen to develop the role in a number of ways – not only keeping followers up-to-date with the journal's latest edition but also sharing relevant breaking news and building a collaborative social media network to improve the journal's reach. While #ChangeTheChange certainly helped to open up the online conversation regarding menopausal health, I still feel we have a way to go when it comes to connecting both professionals and lay people with evidence-based facts and accurate information. Unfortunately, social media is a two-way street – while many genuine healthcare practitioners are active in the field there are countless other self-proclaimed experts peddling (often damaging) misinformation, albeit often with good intention. It's a constant battle that must be fought.

According to Mediabistro, more than 40% of consumers say that information found via social media affects the way they deal with their health. This figure is only going to increase: 90% of 18- to 24-year-old respondents to a PwC Health Research Institute Survey said they would trust medical information shared by others on their social media networks. While PRH is not aimed at this age group, it is undeniable that they are the future and we need to be forward thinking. The internet is here to stay; opting out is, quite frankly, not an option.

So how do we go about this? The ubiquitous hashtag is inordinately useful for getting a message out there, and graphics always win the day. Take #WorldMenopauseDay (18 October), for example: a pictorial tweet I posted – 'Menopause in Numbers' – was shared a total of 41 times and seen by 5900 people. The very same day, I shared the BMS 'Tools for clinicians' via the PRH account and – at last count – these had been seen by a total of 1700. Given that the account is still in its infancy, these are impressive stats. How else could we reach so many in such a short time? At one point, #WorldMenopauseDay was 'trending' fifth on Twitter – something we, and our colleagues, should be proud of!

Since the launch of the PRH Twitter account, downloads of the online journal have risen 120%. In July, with the exception of the recommendations published in 2013, every one of the top ten downloaded papers was from the Special Issue dedicated to the NICE guideline on Menopause Care. This is enormously encouraging and demonstrates an appetite for knowledge and evidence-based information.

Of course, one social media account cannot be all things to all people, and nor should it be. People will look to the journal for accurate, up-to-date information, and that should be its focus. No direct medical advice will be given out, but – if needs be – women, and those caring for menopausal patients, can be directed to appropriate resources for both information and support. At times, it will be necessary to engage in an open forum discussion (for example, to refute the unfortunate wide-spread belief that the only HRT we prescribe are conjugated equine estrogens), but – out of necessity – such engagements should remain limited and factual. Personal opinion has its place in social media, but as the technological face of the journal we must always remain mindful and remember our audience.

We are entering relatively new territory for PRH, but I am optimistic about what we may be able to achieve through the sphere of social media. Please head over to @PostReproHealth and let's continue the conversation.