

## RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

## What can Twitter offer oncology nurses?

by Kristen R. Haase &amp; Sally Thorne

**B**y now, you've heard about Twitter: the social media platform where you can quickly share 140 characters<sup>1</sup> of information with any audience. Twitter is probably best known for GIFs of adorable dogs, hugging cats and over-zealous politicians, but Twitter can also be an asset for keeping up to date with your professional organization, nursing research, and new clinical guidelines. In this edition of Research Reflections, we will share with you how Twitter can be useful for nursing research and practice, how to do it, and a few ideas on who to follow.

<sup>1</sup>The character limit was increased to 280 in November 2017.

### WHY BOTHER USING TWITTER?

There are many merits to Twitter for those in clinical practice and/or those looking to keep aware of new literature. For example, if you follow professional associations, like CANO, they tweet about new clinical guidelines, conferences, and educational webinars. This is a quick way to keep in touch with your professional association. It can also give you a global understanding of what is going on. If, for example, you follow the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care (ISNCC), and European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS), you quickly gain a global perspective on what's happening in oncology nursing, by occasionally (weekly or monthly) reviewing tweets from these groups. It doesn't have to be a daily activity that consumes your time. You can use it as you see fit.

Another feature of Twitter is that you can follow individual clinicians and non-nursing organizations. So, you can follow updates from the American Society of Clinical Oncology

(ASCO). They tweet about recent research and important clinical information that will undoubtedly impact oncology nursing and patient care. Following individual clinicians and retweeting interesting posts, to be part of the conversation, will also give you insight into regional differences. Say you work in a rural area, you can gain insight into the challenges in urban areas, or maybe connect with rural clinicians in different parts of the country or world. Which brings me to my last point about Twitter for oncology nurses. Twitter is a great place to reach out and ask questions. Are you unsure about what other centres are doing for intake practices? Tweet the question and ask people to retweet. You quickly discover a network of like-minded clinicians are literally at your fingertips.

For nurses doing research, Twitter serves a number of purposes. Twitter can be an important platform throughout the research process, from designing a study, recruiting participants, to disseminating your information. Here are a couple of ways Twitter can be helpful for oncology nurse researchers—and this includes those in graduate school!

- Follow important journals to keep on top of all of the latest research,
- Follow relevant professional organizations to learn about conferences to present your research,
- Tweet your questions when you encounter a problem with design or methods, and ask for help,
- Recruit participants by driving traffic towards a study website or ask people to contact you,
- Look for colleagues doing similar research,
- Develop or refine research networks,
- Share your research findings by promoting your own work.

#### 1. How to do it?

To use Twitter, you have to start by opening an account. This is simple: just go to Twitter.com and create an account. You have the option to create a profile that describes who you are; this is essentially how people choose to follow you.

Here are a few profile examples:

Tracy Truant @tracytruant  
PhD candidate. Registered Nurse. President Can. Association of Nurses in Oncology. Mother of teenaged global citizens championing social justice. Opinions own.

Christine Maheu @christinemaheu1  
Associate Professor, McGill University & Clinical Scientist @ELLICSR  
Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Sally Thorne @salthorne  
Professor of Nursing, University of British Columbia; Editor-in-Chief, Nursing Inquiry

#### 2. Find and follow:

Next, you'll want to find people to follow. One way to do this is to use the search function and type in key terms. For example, if I search 'Oncology Nursing', the most popular or top hit is @Oncology Nursing (Oncology Nursing Society [ONS]), @CANO\_ACIO, @ONSfoundation, @lisaksheldon (Lisa Kennedy Sheldon, chief nursing officer for ONS), and @ONSAlec (ONS public policy advocate), to name a few. Once you've selected who you're interested in following, you just tap 'follow', and you will start seeing their tweets in your newsfeed.

#### 3. View and engage (if you choose)

Once you're set up on Twitter, you can choose to be an actively engaged user, or a passive user. An active user logs in daily, and tweets or retweets regularly. A passive user may log into

Twitter on a daily or weekly basis and review tweets, but does not tweet or retweet all that often. That's part of the beauty of Twitter, you don't have to do anything right away, instead, you can observe how others tweet, and observe what works and what doesn't. You don't have to tweet about your pile of dirty laundry if you're curating a professional account. Perhaps instead you tweet about the article you just read (including the URL), the upcoming conference you will attend, or the exciting quality improvement project your organization just reported.

As you "lurk" on Twitter, you will begin to see that you can "quote" someone's tweet and add a comment. You can also insert the Twitter handles of organizations or individuals into your message so that it will be brought to their attention and they will retweet to their followers. Finally, you can discover "hashtags"—word signifiers such as #cancer or communities such as our conference hashtag #CANO2017—that will bring your message to the attention of all who connect with that signifier.

## A WORD OF CAUTION

Despite all of the benefits of Twitter, it is also important to remember that it is a public platform and your tweets can usually be seen by all. Therefore, you want to make sure you don't disclose confidential patient information, sensitive information about your facility, or anything delicate. So, remember, when sharing 140 characters, be sure that they reflect the best version of you, your organization, and your profession.

Happy tweeting.  
@kristenhaase  
@salthorne