Social Media Pros and Cons

Social media connects people with cancer. But it can also be factually unreliable and unsupportive.

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Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms allow people with cancer to connect with one another immediately. That has both pros and cons, according to a recent article in the Journal of Oncology Practice.

Pros: Social media provides psychological and social support, facilitating conversations about the emotional, spiritual and physical challenges of living with cancer and empowering patients to "mentally process their cancer experience," the authors write. It can also provide useful information. Searching your specific diagnosis via a Twitter hashtag can connect you to online communities of people with the same type of cancer and help you find clinical trials.

Cons: Social media can be both factually unreliable and unsupportive, so it shouldn't become a substitute for in-person support or expert advice. It can even lead to financial exploitation—beware of unproven cure claims! Privacy is also at risk: Social media sites are public, so be careful about posting personal medical information.

Physicians can help by becoming familiar with social media, using it for education and outreach—and being a resource for their patients.

If you learn something that may affect your care, bring it to your doctor's attention for an expert opinion.

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