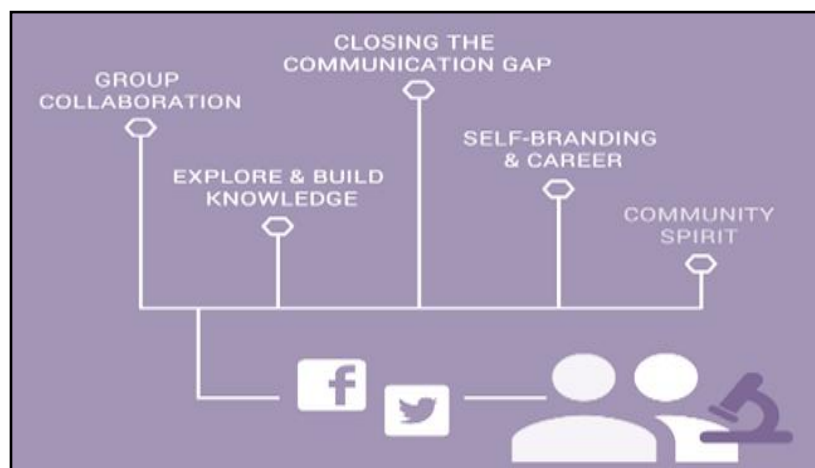


# FIXATION ON HISTOLOGY

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## Social media in pathology

Over the last 50 years, the histology laboratory has witnessed countless technological advances in the streamlining of diagnostic systems. From enclosed tissue processors and staining machines to digital imaging and artificial intelligence, histology laboratories are moving apace. One development that is a significant player in healthcare is the use of social media (often abbreviated as SM or SoMe). An influential tool having the power to transform the pathology landscape, SM creates many opportunities. Since these platforms are free to use, no fiscal decisions are required and involvement of the IT department is not usually a necessity. Through computer-mediated technologies such as websites and applications, SM allows the sharing of resources such as laboratory methods, practices and meetings in real time. By making connections with other colleagues, these platforms enable histotechnologists and pathologists to share their experiences and offer suggestions and updates on research and developments (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Social media drivers for use in pathology**

Nowhere is this more evident than during the pandemic of 2020 when panels of experts around the world shared their knowledge of Covid-19 through the medium of SM posts and video-based learning. Using SM platforms, the ability to transmit high resolution digital images direct from smartphones is also possible. However, the sharing of pathology images often generates debate when ethical guidelines are questioned. If there is a necessity for photographic images of clinical or histological importance to be used, they must be anonymized so they do not interfere with the issues surrounding patient confidentiality. If no privacy issues exist, photographs can be shared as valuable resources for seeking opinions, training and other educational purposes.

There are many platforms currently available that allow the sharing of data with global audiences (Figure 2). Since the principal feature of each of them vary, it is often difficult to decide which platform to use professionally. Nonetheless, whichever one is chosen, the foremost requirements are to set up an account, write a short biography and add a profile picture. One of the most popular online platforms for social media and networking is Facebook (which also offers the services of Instagram and WhatsApp). Through this platform laboratory methods, research projects and interesting cases can be shared on an individual basis or through collaboration with organised pathology discussion groups. In this way, it is possible to interact quickly with multiple individuals and share the information in real time.



**Figure 2. Social media at the touch of a button. The platform logos above include those of Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and YouTube**

Unlike Facebook, the SM platform X allows only short posts (known as tweets or microblogs) up to 280 characters in length. Equally, it allows images and web links to be attached in a similar way to Facebook. With X however, familiarisation of usernames (which have the prefix @) and the use of hashtags (#) that are placed before a keyword or phrase can sometimes be challenging. These hashtags help index the tweet or post, thereby enabling the keyword to be identified during a search using X. For pathology, this is an ideal platform for live video recordings of scientific meetings and conferences and an excellent way to share all the latest information. The ability to live tweet a conference offers a running commentary of proceedings and is a perfect way of attending without physically being present at the meeting.

The messaging ability of the platform Snapchat is more of a compromise than Facebook and X, since posts and images are usually short lived and become inaccessible to followers after a limited time. Snapchat is also more perplexing than the other social media platforms and not generally considered ideal for pathology. In contrast to Snapchat, the social networking platform of Instagram is often accepted as a location to share posts and images. One key disadvantage of Instagram is its lack of privacy settings since it allows accounts and posts to be viewed freely by everyone. However, users can choose to adjust the default setting if needed so that only approved individuals are able to view the account. Another weakness of Instagram is that it has a smaller user base and therefore does not have the broader impact that X and Facebook can achieve. Consequently, the opportunity for boosting visibility using the Instagram platform is reduced.

The ability to share images safely and securely online is central to the success of any social media platform, particularly when applied to pathology. As previously mentioned, the creation of high-quality images can be made readily by utilizing the photo editing applications that are available on modern tablets and smart phones. Images can be modified as required and watermarked as a means of ownership prior to sharing with other users. Often these images can be used as part of a much larger presentation and streamed live by using available resources. Meetings, webinars (web-based seminars) and conferences can be successfully broadcast using the live video functions of platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Zoom or by using other live video applications such as Periscope, recently acquired by X and suitable for both Android and Apple operating systems. As an alternative to video, digital audio files or podcasts covering a broad range of topics relating to pathology are also available to download. Podcasts are generally shorter in length and range from a

few minutes to one hour in duration. As these broadcasts are recorded in audio only, they can be listened to anywhere on smartphones and other mobile devices.

In the modern era, the professional bodies of the National Society of Histotechnology and the College of American Pathologists all use social media platforms regularly. For their members, there are ethical and practical guidelines for those who use SM professionally. For those who have yet to embark on this voyage, the standards of their professional bodies will outline the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries when using these platforms.

### **Further reading**

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