

## The use of social media as a 'leadership behaviour' in medicine

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Australian society faces several major health challenges in the 21st century that require effective leadership from the medical profession. These challenges include, but are not limited to, mental illness, cancer, cardiovascular disease and antimicrobial resistance. Another ongoing challenge is maintaining high-quality and equitable health care in the face of pressure from rising health expenditure and the resultant cost-saving measures.

Recently, the Queensland Government attempted to institute wide-ranging changes to Senior and Visiting Medical Officer contracts. Although these changes have now undergone amendment, the original modifications were drastic, broadly unpopular and instituted without appropriate consultation with the medical community. The proposed changes included a move from collective bargaining agreements to individual contracts, reduced protections from unfair dismissal, institution of key performance indicators that reduced clinical autonomy and the power to move doctors between workplace locations without consent.

The ensuing protest by the medical profession against these one-sided contract changes became one of the most effective and cohesive campaigns enacted by medical doctors in Australia. Social media was an essential communication tool, effective in rallying doctors and keeping them notified of the latest in contract negotiations, as well as offering recourse to community misperceptions. The widespread use of social media during the contract

dispute has jestingly been referred to as our 'Medical Summer' (as opposed to the 'Arab Spring').

Social media in the medical profession must be used with caution and approached in terms of confidentiality and ethics.<sup>1</sup> However, as demonstrated by the contract dispute in Queensland, it is clearly a powerful tool to promote collegiality and to advocate for both public health and professional autonomy. In the 21st century, appropriate use of social media constitutes a 'leadership behaviour'.<sup>2</sup> Its beauty lies in the fact that it gives a voice to all doctors to engage in matters relevant to the profession and public health, with ease and without need for a formal leadership position. We encourage the medical profession to effectively and safely use social media in the future to tackle 21st century health issues.

### References

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