



## EVOLVING DYNAMICS IN PEER-TO-PEER MEDICAL EDUCATION

Peer-to-peer medical education is undergoing a transformation driven by the expanding role of digital media. Traditional forums such as scientific journals and conferences, long helmed by key opinion leaders (KOLs), remain foundational, but they are now complemented, and in some ways challenged, by the emerging influence of contemporary platforms such as social media and medical influencers.

Medical journals and KOL-led seminars have long stood as the bedrock of peer learning in ophthalmology. These platforms have produced a rich tapestry of research exchanges, discussions of cutting-edge treatment, and debates on clinical guidelines. These forums are also increasingly recognized for their limitations in terms of accessibility, time, and cost.

Enter the transformative world of social media, which has revolutionized the way people access information. It has extended the reach of educational content far beyond traditional boundaries and revitalized peer interaction. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram as well as specialized networks such as Doximity and Sermo are dynamic forums. Here, we health care professionals are not just passive recipients but active participants, sharing insights, discussing complex cases, and disseminating research findings in real time.

There has been a simultaneous shift from the traditional KOLs to a new cadre of thought leaders: medical influencers. These are our colleagues who have adeptly harnessed the power of social media to build substantial followings and share their expertise far and wide. Unlike the traditional, more didactic presentations of KOLs, influencers are fostering lively discussions and rapid dissemination of information—a refreshing change in our field.

The changes are not without challenges. The tendency of social media to favor concise content sometimes leads to the oversimplification of complex medical subjects,

posing a risk of misinformation. Moreover, the absence of a rigorous peer-review process—a hallmark of scientific journals—can call into question the accuracy of the information shared on social media platforms.

The ascent of influencers in medical education also raises unique concerns about potential conflicts of interest. Although many of these individuals provide valuable insight and content, its impartiality may be affected by sponsorship or personal bias. It can be challenging for users to differentiate between an influencer's unbiased opinions and content swayed by partnerships.

It is imperative to view traditional and social media-driven methods as facets of the same jewel. Social media platforms and medical influencers can offer quick access to new information and stimulate vibrant discussion. Traditional methods anchored by KOLs and journal articles provide in-depth, peer-reviewed knowledge that is essential to our professional growth.

The shift from traditional journal articles and KOLs to social media and influencers signifies a significant change in peer-to-peer medical education. Each approach has benefits and challenges, but together, these methods offer a richer, more diverse and inclusive educational environment for health care professionals. As we navigate this digital age, let's embrace the changes while maintaining a commitment to responsible, ethical, and accurate information sharing regardless of the platform. ■

WILLIAM F. WILEY, MD | CHIEF MEDICAL EDITOR