How M4s can make social media an asset during residency applications

AUG 2, 2022

Brendan Murphy
Senior News Writer

Social media when harnessed effectively can be one tool in the tool kit that helps fourth-year medical students successfully find a home for residency.

An AMA Medical Student Section education session recorded for the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting examined the benefits of social media use for medical students as they navigate the, at times, arduous residency selection process. Here’s a look at some of the key takeaways.

Put your best foot forward

Christle Nwora, MD, a second-year resident in the pediatrics program at Johns Hopkins, has found that more medical students and residents are keeping their social media platforms public-facing. It can be a good way to show who you are and what you care about. However, the time-honored caveat about making sure you keep it professional applies.

“The greatest thing about using social media is that you get to decide what your digital footprint is going to be, and when people Google your name or search your name, social media can really help you shape that image for yourself,” Dr. Nwora said. “It’s kind of like branding.”

“Make sure it’s an accurate representation of you, one that you would be proud to have patients, to have your program director, to have your co-residents take a look at and know, okay, this is the true essence of [the applicant].”

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/preparing-residency/how-m4s-can-make-social-media-asset-during-residency
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Don’t overuse it for outreach

Social media can be a great way to meet potential colleagues, but when it comes to formal outreach, direct messages over a social channel are best avoided.

“My rule of thumb is that if they are faculty, I don’t DM, I only email,” Dr. Nwora said. “But if they’re co-residents or residents in the program that I’m interested in, I definitely send a message and say, ‘hey, I'm interested in applying to X, Y, and Z in this program. Would you have any opportunity to chat or talk about your experience?’”

Learn what the communication norms are after a residency interview.

Converse with future colleagues

Throughout the application process, there are going to be hundreds, or possibly thousands, of medical students encountering the same highs and lows you are.

“There’s a ton of community building around the specialty that you’re interested in,” Dr. Nwora said. “There’s a ton of different cohorts that are represented through social media platforms where you can also connect with other applicants”

Observe resident attitudes

There are often opportunities to follow residency programs through their official twitter accounts. Applicants can also gain insight by following residents in programs in which you are interested, according to Nicol Jackson, MD, MPH.

“I tell my mentees don’t only just follow the residency programs you're interested in, but follow those residents that are on social media,” said Dr. Jackson, a pathologist who is King County (Wash.) medical examiner and a clinical assistant professor at the University of Washington. “See how they tweet. Do they look happy all the time? Do they look miserable all the time? Are they complaining? Are their programs boasting about whatever research they’re doing, community service they’re doing.”

Find out which factors applicants weigh most when picking residency programs.
Celebrate others

The line between bragging and boosting your credentials can be a thin one on social media.

“Don't just highlight your achievement, highlight other people's,” Dr. Jackson said. “I'll commonly retweet, congratulate, highlight other people's promotions when they publish something, when they attend something. So, when it comes my turn, if I've done something, it doesn't look like I'm boasting, because I'm just highlighting all these different achievements across the whole spectrum.”

For one-stop shoppers

No online resource contains as much information as FREIDA™, the AMA’s comprehensive residency and fellowship database®, which includes more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency programs, and offers a streamlined user experience.

The platform offers any user who has signed in the ability to personalize searches and nickname them so that search filters don’t need to be reapplied every time. AMA members also have the ability to take notes on programs, conduct side-by-side program comparisons, and use FREIDA’s Residency Calculator to help plan ahead for residency application expenses.