

Study of dermatology on YouTube shows new ways science reaches public

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A study shows that with social media, information about skin cancer and sun protection goes straight from researchers to the public. Credit: University of Colorado Denver

YouTube is for more than watching World Cup highlights, Brian Williams refreshing old school rap classics, and videos of skateboarders landing in unfortunate positions on railings. A University of Colorado Cancer Center study published in the *Dermatology Online Journal* shows

that YouTube also allows researchers, journals, and health advocates to connect directly with the public on topics of skin cancer and prevention.

"No matter what field you're in, [social media](#) is the future of how we communicate around the world," says Chante Karimkhani, MD candidate in the lab of Robert Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH investigator at the CU Cancer Center and associate professor of [dermatology](#) at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Dr. Dellavalle also manages the Facebook page and other social media for the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

The study queried YouTube for search terms related to dermatology including "sun protection, skin cancer, skin cancer awareness, and skin conditions." Results included 100 videos with a cumulative 47 million views. The videos were shared a total of 101,173 times and drove 6,325 subscriptions to distinct YouTube user pages.

According to the researchers, whose previous studies include similar examinations of Twitter and Facebook (and forthcoming studies of Instagram and Tumblr), these results point to a new opportunity to disseminate research directly to the public.

"It used to be that researchers and journals depended on independent media to interpret their findings for the public. It could be a little like a game of telephone. Now through social media, journals can have their own presence – their own mouthpiece directly to the public that may include patients or [health care providers](#) or even other researchers," Karimkhani says.

In the field of dermatology, specifically, the researchers see great promise in speaking directly to consumers of social media. They point out that the tanning business is certainly on social media, "recommending tanning strategies and products to use for tanning," says

Karimkhani. "We need to be there as well."

For example, of the videos returned with the search query "skin cancer", 25 percent were educational and another 25 percent were what the researchers considered "complementary and alternative medicine videos." Overall, only 35 percent of videos across all dermatology search terms we uploaded by or featured a biomedical professional.

The researchers hope that as more academic institutions, researchers and journals recognize the promise and accept the challenge of social media, information directly from these credible and well-meaning sources may be able to change the popular conversation.

For [skin cancer](#) and many other diseases, patients and the at-risk public are online. So too are businesses and advertisers. Karimkhani, Dellavalle and collaborators hope that authoritative sources including researchers and journals will learn to add their voices as well.

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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