Social media use may help to empower plastic surgery patients

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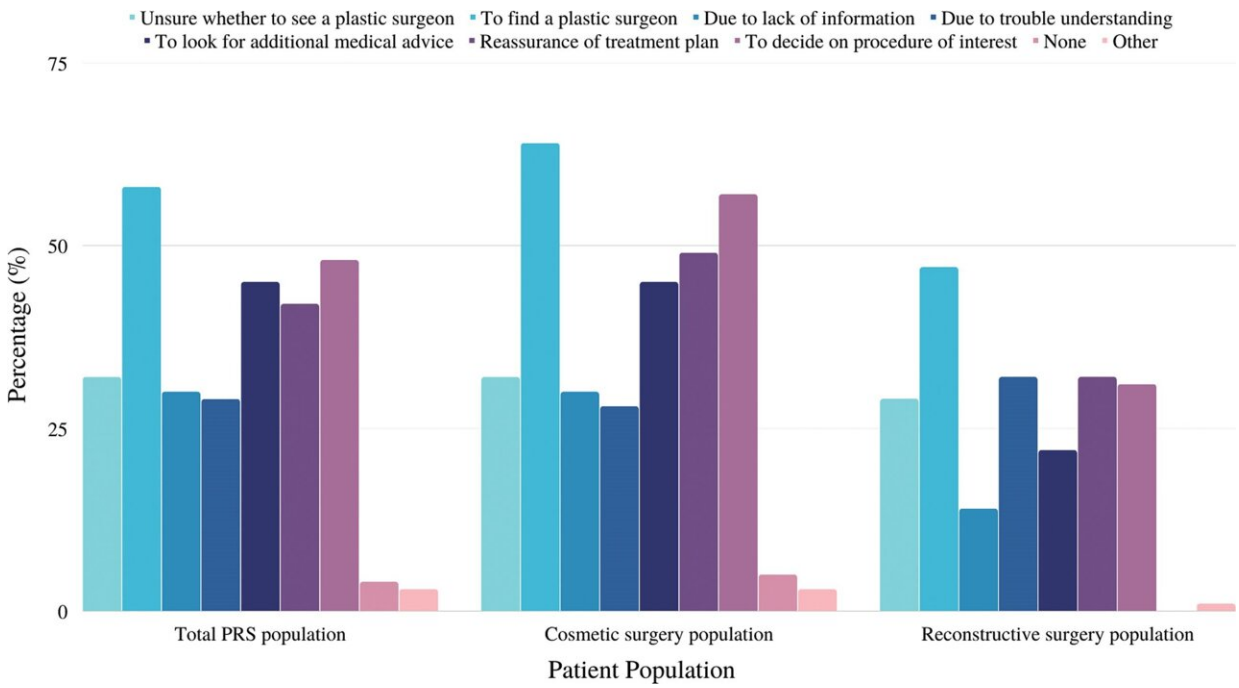

Why PRS patients used the internet. Credit: *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery* (2023). DOI: 10.1097/PRS.0000000000010641

For patients considering or undergoing plastic and reconstructive surgery (PRS) procedures, using social media to gather information and answer

questions can enhance patient empowerment—potentially leading to increased autonomy and better decision-making, reports a study in the April issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*.

"Our study suggests that connecting to social media is associated with meaningful increases in empowerment for PRS patients, and may have positive effects on patient-centered decision-making," comments ASPS Member Surgeon Samuel J. Lin, MD, MBA, of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Social media use linked to higher empowerment scores

The researchers performed an online survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing platform. Of 473 respondents, about 70% had undergone some type of PRS: cosmetic in 40%, reconstructive in 23%, and both cosmetic and reconstructive in 8%. A modified version of the Cyber Info-Decisional Empowerment Scale (CIDES) was used to explore associations between social media and patient empowerment.

About three-fourths of patients reported seeking plastic surgery information online at some time during their PRS experience. Depending on the resources used, patients who obtained information online had higher scores for patient empowerment.

In particular, social media users scored higher on six out of seven CIDES categories: patient knowledge; the decision to consult with a plastic surgeon and questions during the consultation; and treatment decision-making, awareness of treatment decisions, and awareness of other treatment options.

Compared to those using other social media platforms, Facebook users had higher scores in certain categories: decision to consult, questions during consultation, and awareness of other treatment options. RealSelf, a plastic surgery-focused platform, was also associated with increased empowerment in treatment options.

Plastic surgeons urged to 'engage with and contribute to' social media

Social media use had a greater impact on empowerment for patients undergoing cosmetic breast surgery, and for reconstructive procedures on the abdomen/trunk or hand. Most patients said that they received helpful information from their plastic surgeon's office, although some found this information difficult to read.

"As medical care shifts toward a model of patient-centered decision-making, it's important to understand how online information, and social media in particular, affects patient empowerment," says Dr. Lin. "Our findings suggest that social media can be a useful tool to promote patient autonomy and decision-making among patients considering PRS procedures."

Previous studies suggest that patient empowerment is associated with improved health care experiences and outcomes.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and RealSelf offer a "forum-like interface" for patients to post questions and read opinions from other patients and physicians, providing a "sense of community or connection." Dr. Lin adds, "Plastic surgeons can contribute to patient empowerment by engaging with and contributing to social media platforms, providing information based on evidence-based care, and ensuring that the information provided by their office is readable and

understandable."

More information: JacqueLyn R. Kinney et al, Which Groups of Plastic Surgery Patients Are Impacted by Social Media Use? An In-Depth Review of Social Media Engagement, *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery* (2023). DOI: 10.1097/PRS.0000000000010641

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