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Title	Crossing Boundaries: Twitter and Online Communities of Practice for Nursing Students
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/35923/
DOI	10.24377/LJMU.JSML.VOL1ARTICLE367
Date	2020
Citation	Haslam, Michael and Grady, Emma (2020) Crossing Boundaries: Twitter and Online Communities of Practice for Nursing Students. Journal of Social Media for Learning, 1 (1). ISSN 2633-7843
Creators	Haslam, Michael and Grady, Emma

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
10.24377/LJMU.JSML.VOL1ARTICLE367

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The Journal of Social Media for Learning® 2020

Crossing Boundaries: Twitter and Online Communities of Practice for Nursing Students

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Abstract

Nurse education in the United Kingdom is changing. Widening participation initiatives present challenges for Higher Education Institutions, increasing numbers of Nursing Students from a wide range of backgrounds with diverse academic abilities. Changes also to the new NMC standards mean that those nurses qualifying from 2020 will need to be better prepared to deliver care to people with increasingly complex needs, thus requiring a wider range of skills, proficiency in those skills and a breadth of knowledge to support practice.

Social Media has the potential to resolve some of these challenges and to enhance the delivery of nurse education, providing increased opportunities to engage Nursing students outside of the constraints of traditional classroom walls, whilst enhancing the development of student knowledge and skills. Online Communities of Practice may be developed via Social Media platforms such as Twitter, supporting the creation and exchange of knowledge through active engagement and a shared discourse between Novices and Expert clinicians and Academics in the field.

Both a Student perspective and a recent student-led conference at University in the North of England are used here to illustrate how Twitter has the potential to benefit Nursing Students; contributing to an increase in student's social capital; and through real-time opportunities for feedback and reflection, the development of professional identities. A unique aspect of Twitter is also the ability to cross hierarchical boundaries without the limitations of friend requests and closed groups.

Despite potential reservations around the use of Twitter with Nursing Students, such as the blurring of potential boundaries, it is argued that both Students and Academics alike, may benefit from its innovative use and that further research is needed to establish how it can be incorporated into new pre-registration Nursing programmes.

Keywords

Social Media, Twitter, Nurse Education, Community of Practice, Nursing Students,

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