

Social Media

Shilpi Khetarpal, MD, FAAD, interviewed by Steven T. Chen, MD, MPH, FAAD

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: This is Steven Chen with *Dialogues in Dermatology*. Right now, I'm joined by the wonderful Dr. Shilpi Khetarpal, who is part of our Career Launch Boot Camp series here in Columbus, Ohio. I'm excited to have this chance to chat with Dr. Khetarpal. We're both interested in the use of social media and how we harness that in our careers.—

--And so this will be a little bit of a back and forth. Dr. Khetarpal is going to talk a little bit more about Instagram and I'm going to talk a little bit more about the use of Twitter. And so just to kick things off, I'll turn it over to Dr. Khetarpal. I think a nice way to start is just to tell us a little bit about how you got into using Instagram for your practice.

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: Sure. So thank you for having me. I am in practice right now at the Cleveland Clinic. And I focus primarily on aesthetic medicine. So with social media being on the rise and Instagram specifically being created in 2010, now with over a billion users, majority of that Millennial group between 18 and 34. And a lot of them look to social media for not only about new procedures, new things, but also just like health information in general.—

--So in a world where there's just so much misinformation, I think it's really important as an expert in the field to give important impressions of this is what's accurate and this is how things should be done. So when I started my practice after my fellowship, or joined my practice I should say, that's when I started becoming more and more into Instagram. Because I had patients coming to me with wrong information or showing me things that were not necessarily done by physicians. I said it's important to have a voice in this field, to kind of be very clear in terms of these are my credentials, this is where I stand, and to convey that information to them.—

--So it's been about several years since I've started on Instagram. And as time goes on, I feel like it just has kind of integrated as a part of my practice and day-to-day with patient experiences and different things that I'm doing in clinic.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: That's wonderful. To share my side of things, I use Twitter, on the other hand. And one thing that I've noticed on Twitter is that I have a very interesting, not interesting in a bad way, but just a different group of followers than I expected. Can I just start by asking, who are the people that follow you on Instagram?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I would say it's a mix of other dermatologists. Many of them are international or ones that I met in meetings or in the community that I know. A handful of patients. And I would say most of mine, the majority are in that Millennial group. I would say somewhere between like 20s, 30s, maybe even on the older end in the 40s, but it's definitely a younger population.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Gotcha. And do you think the use of Instagram for you has had any impact in terms of patient referrals? Or do you think it's more of an educational platform? Or, as you mentioned, it could be both?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I think it's both, because I do feel like I've had patients say, "Oh, you know," they come and see me for something else and like, "Hey, I saw you're doing this procedure. Tell me more about it." Or patients that live maybe in the near vicinity to me and they said, "I found you on Instagram and I'd like you to tell me more about this." I also think it's important to disseminate information through the way of like whether it's marketing. And also in terms of like collaboration or mentorship. I learn things from my other colleagues in dermatology by different things that are going on. And it can maybe spark an interest for me to look into something, whether it's a new procedure, a device, or whatever it is.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: I think that's so interesting. It's a great point that social media not only is a great way for you to disseminate information, it's a great place for you to learn a lot of new things, too. Giving my perspective from a Twitter point of view, I think Twitter has a very different feel to it. I've always felt that Instagram has been, how do I put this in the right way? It's not quite the platform that I'm meant to be on. As a complex medical dermatologist, I feel like people don't want to be seeing images and images of pemphigus and pemphigoid.—

--But instead, I use Twitter to kind of – I try really hard on Twitter to educate. And to educate not only dermatologists and medical students, but what I've found is my niche group of followers are actually internists. So a lot of internists who are practicing hospital medicine or even primary care physicians. And we put out things called these Tweetorials, where you take people through a series of tweets that can teach a topic.—

--Something that I think is very interesting about the Tweetorial, which I'm interested to hear about your perspective for Instagram, is that I think it's a great educational tool for getting people interested and getting people engaged. But it's hard to go really deep and have a really depth – excuse me. It's very hard to have a very deep dive into a topic. Instead, it seems like a very broad overview of something that I'm talking about.—

--When you're using Instagram for education, is that something similar that you've noticed? Or do you feel like you can get really far into something?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I absolutely feel the same way. Most of the things when I post, because you're limited on like how much content you can put per post, it will be it's geared more towards patients versus like other providers for them to learn about a procedure. So it's very general and an overview. The only time I feel like you can get a little more information out is say like I like to highlight any highlights in my professional career. So say like a journal article I

recently authored could be published and I can put a link to the PDF, and then they could read it.—

--But I do feel like for most patients, that might be overwhelming, the medical jargon and the language. They may not have a full understanding of what they're actually reading.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Right. And it sounds like, from what I can understand, you're primarily a cosmetic dermatologist, but practicing in an academic setting. Do you feel like Instagram is better geared toward an academic or a private practice? Or do you think it doesn't matter?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I think you can use it in any way that you like. For me, because I am in academic dermatology or an academic dermatologist, I do get a lot of internal referrals, even though my practice is all aesthetic. So I'm lucky in the sense that it does help a little bit from the marketing side, but that's not my primary reason for using it. But I do feel like if you're in another setting where you're trying to drive patients to your practice, it can be a great way. It's free and you can have a large reach, depending on your following.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Absolutely. I will say that from a Twitter perspective, Twitter certainly is not a place that I would ever think to advertise my services. Instead, it really is more about the dissemination of information and that interchange of knowledge. And so, for example, for me, I still love following people who put out Tweetorials or interesting tweets about internal medicine, or about OB/GYN, or about some specialty that I have long kind of forgotten from medical school, that at this point I think it's a great reminder. Do you find that you're able to do that, too, with Instagram? Or is it really kind of dermatology focused?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: For me, it's really focused on dermatology. And I think this brings up another point, too, is that I get asked a lot with Instagram and maybe even with Twitter, you can

put your thoughts on this, is that having a personal versus a professional account. So for me on Instagram, I do have two separate accounts because my patients or people that are following may not want to see what's going on in my personal life and I may not want them to know what's going on in my personal life. So I have a private, personal Instagram account, then I have a public, professional Instagram account.—

--So I'm curious to know for Twitter how you use it, because I know my Twitter I use for personal reasons and I like to follow all these different whether it's CNN or whatever it is, but it's definitely not geared towards the medical field.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Absolutely. I think that was something that was really difficult to figure out at the very beginning. So the back story is I started using Twitter because it was a requirement for a course that I was taking that I had to engage in some type of new technology in education. So I signed up for Twitter just on a whim and I really found a group of like-minded individuals that were interested in educating the public or educating at least other physicians and other medical providers.—

--And that's when I had to make that decision of whether this was going to be personal or private. I have really gone the – or excuse me, personal or professional. And what I've really done is geared toward the professional. I almost never post about my family life. If I do, it's all anonymous. Meaning if I ever post a picture of one of my kids, there's a big smiley face emoji over their face, so that no one knows what they actually look like. And that was definitely a decision that I made, where there are a lot of people on Twitter who are freely posting pictures of their family, and that's a personal decision, it's their prerogative.—

--But I think that, for me at least, that's what I was more comfortable with. I think it's interesting, if you look at Instagram, there are definitely people who you would call, quote/unquote, influencers who yes, they have beautiful children, they've got wonderful pets, they're all over

their Instagram feed. And I think that's an interesting decision to make and everyone's got to make that decision however they feel comfortable. It sounds like you had a similar dilemma, as well.

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: Yeah. And I think it has to do with your comfort level than the boundaries with your patients. Because when they come for a visit, you want it to be more medical versus they know about all the stuff in your personal life, even if you're okay with them knowing, I find that it kind of sidetracks things and it just creates just more confusion and it takes up a lot more time. So I think it's best, in my personal opinion, just to have things separate. That way, you can decide what content you want to post where.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Absolutely. One thing that people always ask me, now that they know that I'm very into using Twitter, is how it's changed my professional life. If it's given me any opportunities that it might not have. I'm very open about it. I do think that I've been given some more opportunities just because people know who I am now. So, for example, at the national meeting, at the annual Academy meeting, there are people that are in high leadership positions at the Academy who've come up to me and just said, "Oh, I follow you on Twitter. I like what you're doing on that platform."—

--And to be totally honest, it's folks that I would have never met before, except for the fact that I have put my name out there on this social media platform. And the other thing that's been really helpful, it's helped me connect with other dermatologists. I actually am now working on a manuscript with someone else who I met through #DermTwitter. And otherwise, it's also given me opportunities to present at different meetings.—

--For example, at this meeting here in Columbus, I'm talking about the use of Twitter for your career. I'm curious if you've had similar opportunities because of Instagram, that have allowed you to boost your career or boost whatever part of your professional life, whatever it might be?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: Yeah, absolutely. I do think networking is the biggest thing. So you might meet someone at a meeting, it's very brief. But then by you liking their post say, or that they are able to see your visibility on social media, I think that it definitely puts your name out there and gives you opportunities. I certainly feel like some meetings, things like that, that I've been invited to, it's definitely because they see the name, they recognize it, and then they kind of match your name with your face. So I do think if it's done correctly, it can definitely take you to the next level or help you achieve your goals.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Absolutely. I'm curious, do you have any tips for future potential Instagram influencers that want to get into the game? Specifically in dermatology, any tips that you'd have in terms of how do you get your name out there? How do you get those followers? How do you make good content? What would you say?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: So I think there's a few things to follow. Number one would be, like we touched on, keep your professional and personal life separate. I think number two, be transparent with your credentials. So when I click on my Instagram page, it says exactly who I am, where I am, and what I do. I think it's really important to have, for something like Instagram where it's largely photo-driven, you should have a specific social media consent for those photos. A patient doesn't want to look on your Instagram and see a picture of them that they didn't consent to having there.—

--And then use a lot of content. I use things in my story, on my Instagram TV. I use that content in the office. So I think it's really important to have content across multiple platforms, whether it's YouTube Channel, what have you. And then follow other people that you look up to. So other dermatologists or other people doing the same thing, follow them, see what they're doing, you kind of learn from each other. And then over time, it's just a matter of time before your name gets out there.—

--So every time I present at a meeting or on the back of my business card, it has my Instagram professional name, and that way people can follow you. And over a matter of time, I think you just get a following and it just makes things easier. And before you know it, you're up there with the people that you kind of looked up to and you're able to achieve your social media and professional goals.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: That's wonderful. I think it's very similar from a Twitter perspective. I would highlight the same thing that you've said, which is about patient consent. In Twitter, we're very careful to use basically publicly-sourced photos for any teaching slides for rashes, lesions, anything like that. And if any patient is okay with using their clinical photos for a Tweetorial or just a tweet about teaching some aspect of dermatology, we're very careful to make sure they sign a written social media consent form, which I believe most institutions should actually have at this point, because it's taken off.—

--There's actually institutions now that have chief social media officers. There are definitely institutions out there who have really taken this to heart, as the future of potentially medical education. So I think that it's easy to find those things. I like the tips that you've thought about, too. I would echo the same thing from a Twitter perspective. I think following the people that you look up to and then engaging in a dialogue with them, whether it's through a DM, a direct message, or if it's someone you know, obviously texting and just connecting, so that you can help amplify each other's message I think is helpful.—

--The other thing in Twitter that I think is helpful is that if you follow certain hashtags, just like you can on Instagram, it starts to put certain things in your feed that will be much more in tune with what you're interested in looking at. There's a lot of political stuff that is on Twitter, and I think this is another tip that I would give, is that you really have to decide how you're going to use this social media. For me, I try very hard to be apolitical, to not mention politics in anything

that I tweet about because I really feel that my job on that platform is to educate about dermatology, as opposed to really putting my thoughts out there from a political standpoint.—

--Although everyone has their own agenda, so there are definitely people who both educate and get political, too. Do you have any thoughts about the politics, especially right now, like how you deal with all that stuff?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I agree with you, like stay neutral, stay out of that. One other thing that comes up, especially more in the aesthetic realm, is be careful with the brand names. So like you don't want to look like you're supporting one or another. I don't have commercial interest in any of them, so I keep things very general, if you're going to talk about a filler versus like a brand name. Because then you never know who's reading it or when it comes across, you don't want to seem like you're biased to something. And I think if you are, it's important to state that because you want to make sure that you're being as transparent and neutral as possible in the information you're giving, the people reading it should know where you're coming from.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Right. And obviously, this isn't about you, but I think that there are other Instagrammers out there who do have corporate sponsorship, and so I think that's interesting. What does conflict of interest disclosure statements look like in this age of social media? And pretty much nonexistent. So the level that people will disclose their relationships is really dependent on that person. So just something for people who are interested in getting to begin to think about in terms of someplace that we have to be careful. Any other tips that you'd like to share with our listeners?

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: I think one last thing, and this is something that I made the mistake of and got burned on early in my career, is that I posted a picture, I had the patient consent, and then a friend of mine sent me this picture that was posted by someone else, my picture. So watermark things, put your name on them, have some way of it's your photo, it's your right. If

you don't want to be reproduced, make sure you take the tasks or steps to ensure that that doesn't happen or that you get credit for it.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: I think that's a great tip, absolutely. I do the same thing on Twitter. I'm assuming most people are not re-tweeting my slides on derm pathophysiology. But I think that's a really good point though. The last thing I wanted to do was if you don't mind sharing your Instagram handle, so if any listeners want to start following Dr. Shilpi Khetarpal, I think that would be a great thing.

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: Yeah. So I am Skin Doc SK, so S-k-i-n-D-o-c-S-K.

STEVEN T. CHEN, MD, MPH: Perfect. And if you are remotely interested in following me on Twitter, my handle is Dr. Steven T. Chen, So D-r-S-t-e-v-e-n-T-C-h-e-n. A little bit longer, a little bit harder to use. But when you see it typed out, it makes a little bit more sense. Any parting words for our listeners? Or I think otherwise, it was great to have this conversation with you, Dr. Khetarpal, to think about how social media can be integrated into our practices, into our careers.—

--And I do think that what's interesting is that even though Instagram and Twitter are both relatively new on the scene, they've really seemed to fulfill two different niches in the market or in the population, in terms of who's looking, who's listening, who's really following. So again, thank you so much for your time. And I look forward to your talk here in Columbus.

SHILPI KHETARPAL, MD: Great, thank you.