

Palliative care on Twitter: who to follow to get started

Craig Nicholson

If up until now you've only either dismissed Twitter out of hand or else signed up, 'followed' Stephen Fry and Lady Gaga, haltingly sailed one or two tweets off into the void ('Hello? Is anybody there?'), shrugged, and given up, then this commentary is for you.

Twitter needn't take up much of your time, and nor is it difficult to get to grips with—even if it seems that way at first. There are some excellent guides out there on how to use it, such as on from the BC Patient and Safety Council (2012), and you should take the time to familiarise yourself with relevant codes of conduct, such as that from the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council (2012). However, the single most important factor that will determine how you get on with it is the people you choose to follow and interact with, and that is where this article comes in.

Here I present my own personal tips on some top palliative care tweeters to get you started. I have included a mixture of individuals and institutions, offering a varied diet of more and less academic offerings. I hope it will be useful, and if you feel like letting me know what you think, you can do so via @IntJPalliatNurs. Of course, there are many more excellent accounts that could have featured if space were not an issue, so do explore on your own once you are up and running. Happy tweeting!

@APCAssociation

The African Palliative Care Association works to 'ensure that palliative care is widely understood, integrated into health systems at all levels and underpinned by evidence in order to reduce pain and suffering across Africa'. In addition to providing a wealth of information about its activities via its own website (www.africanpalliativecare.org), the APCA also owns the Africa edition of the new palliative care website ehospice (www.ehospice.com/africa). Its Twitter feed provides a quick and easy way to keep abreast of the latest developments affecting palliative care in Africa and beyond.

@CSI_KCL

This is the account of the Cicely Saunders Institute of Kings College London, 'the world's first purpose-built institute of palliative care'. Set up in July 2012, the account immediately took off with a confident stream of palliative care-related tweets, and it hasn't faltered since. On the day of writing it has tweeted links to commissioning guidance for specialist palliative care from the Association of Palliative Care of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as to a BBC Radio 4 programme exploring the language of bereavement and grief.

@DianeEMeier

Dr Diane E Meier is Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care (@CAPCpalliative), 'devoted to increasing the number and quality of palliative care programmes in the USA', and Professor of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine. Many people on Twitter tweet not only about their profession or calling but also about their own personal views and interests—and that can certainly be entertaining—but if you don't have the time or inclination for such distractions then Dr Meier is a perfect person to follow for an almost purely palliative influx of interest.

@DyingMatters

Dying Matters was set up by the UK's National Council for Palliative Care to 'promote public awareness of dying, death and bereavement'. Its Twitter presence is hence a lively mix of the intellectual and the celebratory, and is an unfailing source of stimulation on all matters dying. Topics of recent tweets include a free talk by east London's oldest funeral directors, and Dying Matters' own new form My Funeral Wishes, which 'lets you create a personal funeral plan that reflects you as an individual'.

@EAPCOnlus

This is the account of the European Association of Palliative Care (EAPC). At present it serves

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purely as a feed for the EAPC's excellent blog (www.eapcnet.wordpress.com)—which covers such subjects as the recent launch of Latin America's first-ever palliative care atlas, as well as updates on EAPC activities around their guidelines, taskforces, and publications—but it will hopefully soon expand into a more flexible means of keeping in touch with all that the EAPC is doing.

@GrangerKate

Dr Kate Granger's interests are, among other things, elderly medicine, continence, delirium, and palliative care in the acute hospital setting. However, Dr Granger has also been diagnosed with a terminal illness herself, and now writes about her experiences as both a practitioner and a recipient of care. Of all of the accounts listed here, Dr Granger's is perhaps the most personal, and yet it remains highly informative.

@jfclearywise

Dr Jim Cleary is Director of the Pain and Policy Studies Group (@painpolicy) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a frequent contributor to the #hpm (hospice and palliative medicine) tweetchat, leader of the #hpmglobal tweetchat it inspired, and a seemingly tireless retweeter of all things palliative care, to the extent that you could almost get along by following just him alone.

@kesleeman

Dr Katherine Sleeman, a Clinical Lecturer at the Cicely Saunders Institute, provides a fantastic illustration of the opportunities that Twitter has to offer. Whereas many people tend to stick to tweeting and retweeting links to articles and information, Dr Sleeman goes to considerable effort to engage with other users in a much more interactive way, yet rarely straying far from her core interest.

@NEoLCP

The National End of Life Care Programme is the body that helps to implement the Department of Health's End of Life Care Strategy for England. It publishes a monthly newsletter as well as frequent reports that are made freely available for download, all of which can be easily kept on top of via its tweets. The account also does not shy away from retweeting other sources of important information relating to end-of-life care in the UK.

@Pall_Care_Aus

Palliative Care Australia is a body comprising eight state and territory palliative care associations

and the Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine. As yet the English-speaking palliative care presence on Twitter is somewhat limited outside the UK and North America, making the @Pall_Care_Aus account an almost essential follow.

@Pallimed

Pallimed is a hospice and palliative medicine blog that has been running since 2005, averaging an impressive 148 posts per year. Founder and lead poster Dr Christian Sinclair (@ctsinclair) kicked off the first-ever #hpm tweetchat in 2010, and it has been going from strength to strength ever since. One recent blog highlight is a post on the ongoing rise of 'integration' as a theme in palliative care.

@thewpca

The Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance defines itself as 'a global action network focusing exclusively on hospice and palliative care development worldwide', and has a membership comprising national and regional hospice and palliative care organisations. It owns the international edition of the ehospice website (www.ehospice.com/), but as well as tweeting links to stories on the site it is also quick to retweet anything of potential interest to its palliative care following.

@VirtualHospice

The Canadian Virtual Hospice, chaired by renowned dignity researcher Dr Harvey Max Chochinov, has been offering palliative care information, advice, and support online to members of the public and professionals since 2004 (www.virtualhospice.ca). It is now a prolific engager with the palliative care field via Twitter, tweeting mostly in English but—uniquely for those listed here—also sometimes in French. 

BC Patient and Safety Council (2012) Twitter for health care professionals. <http://bcpsqc.ca/knowledge/twitter-for-health-care-professionals/> (accessed 10 January 2013)

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2012) Social networking sites. www.nmc-uk.org/Nurses-and-midwives/Advice-by-topic/A/Advice/Social-networking-sites/ (accessed 10 January 2013)

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