

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application developed in 2009 and quickly spread among users of all ages, for personal relationships, as entertainment, as an aid to the study and as a virtual place of contact with their group. The international scientific literature on the use of this application in the health sector, identified by the major database on-line reports only a small number of publications. Although its impact in the clinical setting has been poorly investigated, WhatsApp is among the most widely used communication tools, which may also be valuable in favoring the communication and relationship between patients and physicians. Healthcare providers should be trained to use modern web-based communication systems with accurate assessment of indications and contraindications. In particular, virtual means should be prevented from replacing real interactions ¹⁾.

WhatsApp represents a safe, efficient communication technology ²⁾, for clinical and academic endorsements. The method is cheap and quick and easy to operate ³⁾.

As an intradepartmental communication tool can bring about an improvement in patient-related awareness, communication and handovers among orthopedic residents ⁴⁾.

There is a need to incorporate Web 2.0 tools such as WhatsApp in our teaching methods to capture as much screen time of the students as possible ⁵⁾.

Joshi et al., reported the use of WhatsApp, for neurosurgical referral service in their Institution. They extend the use of WhatsApp application from a purely intra-departmental informal communication to a formal tertiary referral service for Neurosurgical referrals. The pros and cons of deploying such system are discussed and important concerns are highlighted.

Over a period of one year, the authors record 1412 referrals to the Neurosurgical service at a tertiary referral centre using WhatsApp application. All the data gathered through WhatsApp referrals was subsequently validated and analysed for any errors. They identify eight incidences where the system did not accurately convey the intended information. They highlight the potential issues related to data accuracy and confidentiality encountered in using such a system.

In this preliminary study, the authors consider WhatsApp application as an important tool for Neurosurgical referrals. It is safe, cheap, reliable and user-friendly application allowing seamless transfer of data including clinical videos and scan images to the on call neurosurgical team. Loss of data quality, concerns surrounding patient confidentiality, errors caused by inter-operator variability in capturing data and default prohibition of use of such social media applications in many institutions are important disadvantages in regularly using such service.

Smartphone-based social media clients such as WhatsApp provide a promising future for faster, reliable communication of clinical and radiological data, which can be used for on-call neurosurgical referrals. Integration with PACs applications and facial recognition may facilitate increasing use of such applications in future addressing many of the concerns that currently prohibit their universal use ⁶⁾.

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