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What's an Ophthalmologist Doing on Instagram?

Remember when Instagram was a refreshing break from Facebook because it just showed pictures from friends? Well, Instagram—which now has over a billion active users—has morphed, as social media platforms are wont to do, and it's become a powerful venue for physicians to share medical information and engage with followers.

What exactly are ophthalmologists doing on Instagram? Many ophthalmology Instagram sites focus on education. For instance, Matt Weed, MD, shares photos, videos, and text about pediatric eye conditions ([mattweed_eyedoctor](#)). He recently posted a great video of a patient with spasmodic nutans along with an explanation of the condition and its excellent prognosis. And while Rob Melendez, MD, MBA, the Academy's Secretary for Online Education, has an active social media presence on several platforms, he just started a separate Instagram site ([eyeqdoctorrob](#)) specifically to educate medical students, physicians, and the public.

Rupa Wong, MD, also started her blog ([drrupawong](#)) to educate her patients (and their parents) about pediatric ophthalmology, but it evolved into a mentoring site when young physicians began messaging her with questions about clinical practice, how to match in ophthalmology, or how she manages a private practice while raising 3 children. "Trainees may feel embarrassed to ask a senior attending about their work-life balance, but social media level that field and provide a platform to discuss sensitive topics."

Usiwoma Abugo, MD, an oculoplastics specialist, would agree. She designed her Instagram blog ([mentormemd](#)) specifically to mentor young physicians and medical students. Followers contact her through the blog for help with personal statements, resumes, and professional advice.

The site developed by Jesse Berry, MD, evolved the other way around. She initially started a fashion blog, she said, "because I found a void for fashion advice for professional women." However, as she blogged, she realized that people wanted more of a connection. "Readers wanted to see what I do, why I do it, and what's cool and unique about ophthalmology and ocular oncology." Now her blog ([_moda_md](#)) covers a blend of topics: fashion, lifestyle, art, travel, ocular oncology, what it's like to be an eye surgeon, and her research. "Because my blog is a platform for professionals to embrace

their entire selves (in and out of the white coat), I need to include all those aspects."

Similarly, Andrea Tooley, MD, posts about her work along with her other passions of cooking and fitness ([dr.andrea.tooley](#)). "I want to show that you can have a life outside of medicine but still be passionate and committed to your work."

Recognizing the power of social media to educate the public about eye issues, Steve Christiansen, MD, prepared a short video prior to last year's solar eclipse about the risks and prevention of solar retinopathy ([eyestevemd](#)). Between Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the video had over 100,000 views.

With such power to connect to users, physician Instagram bloggers have tremendous responsibility. Ophthalmologist-bloggers must be meticulous about HIPAA, professionalism, and accuracy. "Do not give medical advice," Rob advised. "You can use generalities about eye conditions, but always refer a person to their ophthalmologist or emergency room." The Academy developed a terrific Advisory Opinion on Social Media and Professionalism that discusses the nuances of physician responsibility.¹ And—in the latest development—the Academy has launched an Instagram account to complement its other social media channels. To check it out, go to [aao.org/instagram](#).

Ophthalmologists who are on Instagram aren't just posting cool pictures and comments. Most are building a community around a common interest: ophthalmology. Usiwoma finds great satisfaction in providing mentorship and encouragement through her Instagram blog. She said, "As physicians, we add value to someone's life every day; my social media presence should do the same."



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¹ [aao.org/ethics-detail/advisory-opinion-social-media-professionalism](#).