

## VOGUE

### Should Your Plastic Surgeon Be Dancing on TikTok?

Genevieve Monsma | December 15, 2023



Photographed by Raymon Meier, Vogue, March 2012

What's hot? Doctor-driven skincare and plastic surgery postings on social media, with [#plasticsurgeonsoftiktok](#) currently boasting more than 253 million views on TikTok—and [#dermatologist](#) clocking in at a massive 17.5 billion. What's (maybe) not? Seeing your doctor do the Dougie.

"I am okay with my dermatologist posting something educational on social media, but I wouldn't be thrilled seeing her dance on TikTok—that seems like a poor use of a doctor's time," says Debbie Morris, 54, a marketing executive in Atlanta. (For some doctors, not only has posting been a poor use of their time, but it has gotten them punished for malpractice.)

And it's true that routine posting can take away from patient care or appointment availability—something doctors worry about, too.

"I don't really enjoy social media, honestly, at all," says Catherine Chang, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills with a following of 33.4K followers on Instagram and 51.4K on TikTok (@catchangmd). "It takes an hour to create a single post. You have to put before and after photos together, make sure the photo sizing is correct, write captions, and add hashtags. And then if you put it up wrong, you have to take it down, fix it, and repost. It just takes time I don't have. Now I have a team member who runs my TikTok and Instagram. I still direct the content but I delegate a lot of the work."

Other doctors take different tactics to avoid allowing posting to infringe on their workday—for

example, by shoe-horning it into downtime. “All of my time in the office is spent seeing and treating patients,” says Robert Anolik, MD, a board-certified Manhattan dermatologist with nearly 28.1K followers on Instagram (@drrobertanilk). “But I will say that it’s amazing, thanks to New York traffic, what you can accomplish on Uber rides to and from the office.”

Even Muneeb Shah, DO, a board-certified Manhattan dermatologist who is currently the most followed (18.2 million) dermatologist (@dermdoctor) on Tiktok (he also has one million followers on Instagram), admits he recently scaled back on time allocated to posting because his first priority is, well, being a doctor. “When I first started on social media, it was during my residency, and I spent a good 30 hours doing it each week. I would work in the clinic for 50 hours a week, then I would spend the rest of my time studying and creating social media content. But now that I’m a practicing doctor, I devote maybe 15 hours a week. I do it less because I want to do it less, I suppose. And I have a team now that helps me.”

Despite some misgivings about the time involved, most dermatologists and plastic surgeons do agree that social media, like it or not, is now part of the job description. “Having a professional social media account has become as fundamental as having a website for your practice,” says Anolik. “It’s how patients learn about who you are, what you do, and how to find you. Social media is also a way to stay connected, since they’re [practically] living, breathing things. You can update your page or feed as often as you want. Plus, they give a much better sense of your aesthetic, sensibility, and personality than a static website does.”

There are other upsides to social media. Elizabeth Houshmand, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Dallas with more than 76.3K followers on Instagram (@houshmandmd), says she initially created her professional account because, “I was invited to be a speaker at a media event and I was required to have one!” But she soon saw the value of the connection it afforded with current and prospective patients. “Social media is an amazing way to create a community. And it gives you the ability to reach not just followers in your geographic area, but globally.”

The wide reach is also a reason some doctors have upped their social media engagement, posting with more frequency in an attempt to dispel misleading information going viral on the same platforms (see: skin slugging, period facials, skin icing, etc.).

“I was spending more than half my time with patients correcting misinformation they heard online and calming fears that were unfounded. As a dare from one of my nurses, I decided to finally do something about it and address the problem where it started—online,” says Shereene Idriss, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in New York City with 727K followers on Instagram and 570.2K on TikTok (@shereeneidriss). “So, one night I got in bed, picked up my phone, and posted a video. And then I made another. Before I knew it, my patients began sharing the videos, I started answering more people’s questions, and over time our little group of skincare obsessives transformed into a global community of empowered skin nerds. That’s how #PillowtalkDerm family was born.”

Even professional organizations that were once skeptical of doctors on social media now recognize the power and reach of these platforms, and are even providing resources to get started. “As surgeons, we’ve come to realize that we must meet patients where they are—and social media is where they are looking for information,” says **Steven Williams, MD**, a plastic surgeon in Dublin, California and president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

“It’s important that we’re on social media because it’s important to fight against some of the negative and untrue information out there,” Williams adds. “Traditional media has guardrails. But on social media, those guardrails don’t exist. So, to some extent, it’s become our obligation as doctors to combat some of that [misinformation].”

And then there are MDs who seem un-bothered by the criticism that social media (or TikTok dancing) could be a distraction from their day job, instead viewing the medium as a worthwhile marketing move, especially if they are trying to establish a new practice.

Jerry Chidester, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in South Jordan, Utah with 105K followers on Instagram and 87.1K on TikTok (@drchiddy) doesn’t shy away from a TikTok dance challenge. “I’ve been in private practice now for five years, but I started my professional Instagram account six years ago while I was a fellow at USC in Los Angeles. I knew I was moving to Utah, and my goal was to build a practice. I had no patient base, and no one knew who I was,” he says. “Social media was a way to get information out there about myself as a doctor.”

Chidester’s approach has clearly hit the mark, as his surgery calendar is booked two years out—and he has a five-year waiting list. He also just won the ASPS’s first-ever social media award.

“This award went to Dr. Chidester because we thought his approach was very well-balanced,” says Williams. “He’s talking about patient experiences, his own experience becoming a plastic surgeon, and how he integrates plastic surgery into his life with his family. He takes the time, energy, and effort to make patients feel more comfortable and to provide valuable information for patients considering surgery.”

The success of Chidester’s prolific social media strategy may also suggest younger patients (Millennials, Gen Z) are more open to a doctor’s playful presence on social media than some older patients less accustomed to seeing their doctors online. “My practice is probably a bit younger, as I do a lot of breast and body work for new moms,” says Chidester, who calls his office “an Instagram practice” and estimates 35 percent of his patients are from outside his local area and found him online.

“I found Dr. Chidester on social media doing dances,” says Anzana Woodward, 35, of Orem, Utah. His choreography helped get her attention, but it was the photos he had posted of his work that inspired her to book an appointment. “Because of his online presence, I was immediately comfortable with him at my first consultation. Undergoing plastic surgery can be such a vulnerable thing, but I felt safe, cared for, and very comfortable with Dr. Chidester. I think his social media had a lot to do with that.”

Another point of contention for some patients: doctors who post a lot of paid content. While most dermatologists and plastic surgeons are very transparent when a post is sponsored, the fact that a doctor would accept money to endorse a product rubs some the wrong way.

“I’m fine with doctors being on social media, and I trust that he or she can manage her time, but I find it off-putting when they are pushing one brand, and it’s clear they are being paid to do so,” says Jessica Bonka, 39, a hair colorist in Canton, Michigan. “I mean, is CeraVe really good for everything? It makes me question their credibility.”

Shah, who has accepted paid partnerships, insists he puts any brand or product through “my own internal code—I won’t talk about products that I wouldn’t recommend to my own mom. That’s my barometer for product recommendations,” he says.

But even if a doctor uses personal metrics before accepting money from a brand, it still brings up the question of authenticity—and whether a follower can tell the difference between regular and sponsored posts. “On TikTok today, some of the top viewed dermatology-related videos are sponsored,” says Yarden Horwitz, co-founder of Spate NYC, an A.I.-based platform that uses data science to predict beauty trends. “So, it can be hard to tell whether viewers are seeking out that doctor or product—or a brand has paid for the visibility.”

Finally, some patients worry about having a doctor who might pressure them to sign a photo or video release form, and become fodder for the practice’s feed. “I don’t want to be in a position where I’m made to feel bad, or worse, become a lower priority patient, because I’ve declined to be in a post,” says Morris.

Most of the doctors we spoke with insisted this would never happen—and if it did, then it’s time to bid that doctor adieu.

“Establishing consent is huge,” says Chidester, “I’ve talked to a lot of other surgeons and practices, and we are all adamant about using a consent form that is very specific. The patient can say, yes, I’m okay with Instagram. Yes, I’m okay with Facebook—or whatever. Or they can say no, and decline all of it. We can also remove any identifying characteristics—and I’d never tag a patient’s own social media account. Finally, they can change their mind down the road, and ask us to remove something they previously approved.”

Shah says he typically doesn’t post patient images, in part because of the awkwardness it can create. “I’m not the moral police or trying to tell other doctors how to run their accounts. But patients come to see you because they have an issue and they want you to improve it,” he says. “That patient-doctor relationship is really important. And if you try to commercialize the relationship by putting them in a social media post, that could be a barrier to their care.”

At the end of the day, says Williams, a priority of any doctor should be patient care and comfort. “As important as it is to do social media, it’s more important to do it well and safely. We never want to hurt patients—or put them at risk.”

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