



Diane Ménage

describes the benefits of social media and provides a useful guide to get you started

Connecting for compassion

SUMMARY: On a mission to promote compassion in midwifery practice I was looking for effective methods of sharing and developing my ideas. I recognised the benefits of networking through more traditional methods but was not really utilising social media. Then another midwife encouraged me to use Twitter. Although not particularly confident with social media and unsure about how it could support me professionally, I decided to try it. Six months later I have some new skills and I am part of a dynamic and stimulating online community. This article is a personal account of that learning journey in which I reflect on some of the benefits that I have discovered so far.

Keywords Compassion, networking, social media, continuing professional development, resilience, support, community

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California dreaming

As I sat in the conference centre in California it felt a bit like a dream! I had come for a series of three conferences on compassion. Listening and learning, there was so much that was applicable to midwifery. But it wasn't just being at the conference that was amazing. Using social media platforms, I was able to share what I was learning with hundreds of others all over the world and as they shared it with others, thousands of people had the opportunity to have a taster of what I was learning and contribute their thoughts and ideas. As I tweeted presentation slides and highlights from the conference, I reflected on how this had come to pass.

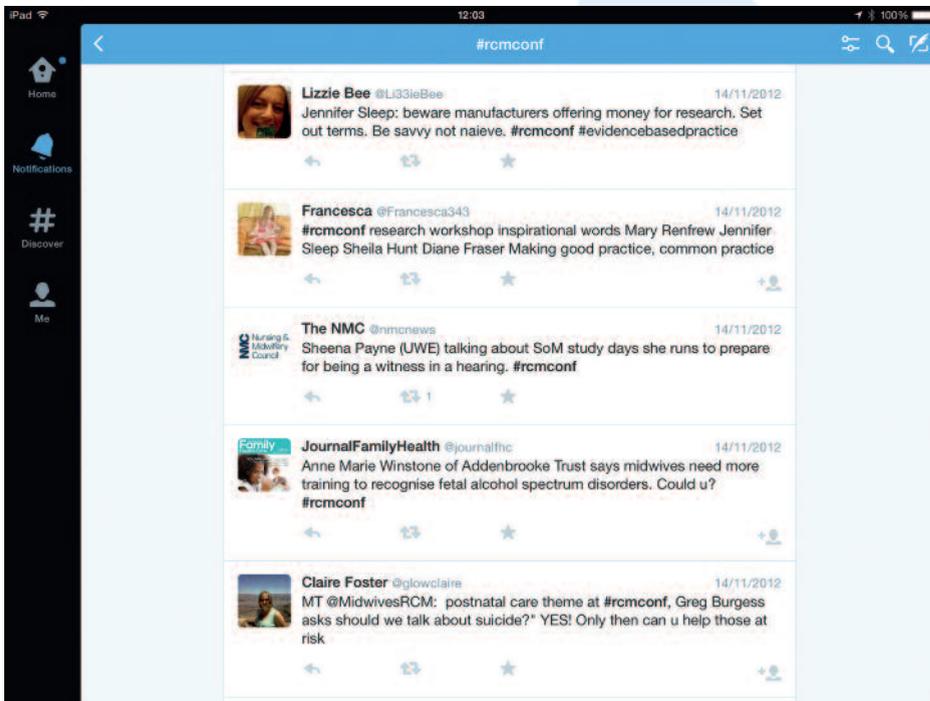
A passion for compassion

I am a midwife who believes that compassion

can transform practice. It's a simple but powerful idea that has motivated me to study compassion as a subject and explore ways in which it could impact on midwifery and the women and babies we care for. *The Compassion in practice strategy* (Department of Health (DH) 2012), which gave us the 6Cs, has marked a renewed interest in compassion as an aspect of care. I am convinced that all birthing women want compassionate midwifery care and all midwives want to provide it. But sometimes things get in the way of compassion, and understanding why this happens and how to prevent it is key (Firth-Cozens and Cornwell 2009). As I learnt more about compassion I understood that it was vital to develop my ideas with others. It seemed natural to seek out like-minded midwives. Sheena Byrom and Soo Downe's new book *The roar behind the silence* >>

Table 1 Tips for getting started on Twitter

Tip	Explanation/benefits
Sign up. You will need to choose a username or ' handle ' as it is called on Twitter. You will need to pick a password	Taking the first step is the most important one. Your Twitter handle will be the name that the public identifies you by so pick one that feels right for you and reflects your own preferences regarding being recognisable
Create a short profile – sometimes called a ' bio '	You may want to say something about yourself. It helps people to decide whether to follow you. Include your professional interests and links to more information about you/your work. Add a picture if you wish
Post your first tweet . Tweet in the box underneath the question 'What's happening?' and it must be 140 characters or fewer	Soon you'll start building your network and you'll want to have something on your page when your first visitors arrive. But don't worry if you don't get any responses at first. Keep going and they will come. The language or structure of a tweet can seem a bit unfamiliar at first. Don't be put off. Keep reading and tweeting and the fog will lift
Find a Twitter buddy to show you the ropes	It's helpful if someone can show you the ropes as you get started. They can give you tips which will help you use Twitter more effectively. You can follow them and they can follow you if they want to. There is no obligation to follow anybody unless you want to, though, and you can unfollow if you change your mind
Once signed up, search for terms like 'midwifery'	You will see lots of interesting tweets and links to more information like blogs . ' Favourite ' the tweets if you particularly like them and if you click ' retweet ', your followers will see it, too
Look out for people with similar interests	You are likely to be interested in what they tweet and vice versa. These are the people to follow. Often they will follow you back and this is how you build up a network of like-minded people
Join a conversation	You can send a public reply to a tweet by putting @ before their username and then typing your message or click the reply button. For example putting @dianethemidwife would direct your reply to me
Follow key midwifery leaders, organisations and journals	You will be able to connect with those who are leading shaping and influencing our profession. For example @RCM @ThePractMidwife
Search or follow a hashtag	# on your keyboard is used with words or a code. Hashtags are a way of grouping tweets together, making them easy to find (such as #skintoskin #compassionatemidwifery). Many midwifery conferences now have hashtags
Click on #discover	This shows information being shared by people you follow and who follow you; this makes the content especially relevant to you and you alone
Join in a formal Twitter chat or forum	Take a look at WeCommunities website http://www.wecomunities.org/ click tweet chats and then tweet calendar and it will detail the subjects and dates/times of any scheduled chats and how to join in. The website also has a ' Twitteriversity ' which is a good resource for professionals learning to use Twitter
Follow The Practising Midwife to join our community of midwives	Search for @ThePractMidwife and click on follow



(Byrom and Downe 2015) explores compassion in midwifery. I contacted Sheena and she advised me to use social media as a way of networking. Social media have been hailed as a quick, easy and effective platform for networking (Omand 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). I didn't know much about social media and I am not naturally at ease with technology, but I was keen to share and develop my ideas with others. But where to start?

Sharing and developing ideas

Twitter is a social networking service that lets users write and read online messages known as tweets using up to 140 characters. It is free and fairly easy to sign up. Links to other work online, photographs and film clips can all be added. With 284 million monthly active users and 500 million tweets sent each day, Twitter has huge potential to spread ideas. Only a few months ago Twitter didn't make sense to me and I didn't think I could say anything worthwhile in 140 characters. I thought I

didn't have the time or the skills for it and could not see the benefits anyway. These are common reasons for being apprehensive about social media (Cooper 2012). But I was encouraged to have a go and I was motivated by my interest in compassion, which I wanted to share. The Twitter website's beginner's guide and a quick online tutorial gave me enough

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information and confidence to get started. I am still a beginner and learning all the time but I now feel part of a much wider community which includes midwives, other healthcare professionals and maternity service users. Social networks are non-hierarchical and I found Twitter to be a great leveller, communicating with midwifery academics, student midwives and health service managers at the click of a button. We are all refreshingly equal on Twitter and it has been described as the ultimate global democracy (Byrom and Byrom 2014).

Staying professional

Social media have sometimes had a negative image in midwifery and other health professions. This is usually connected to confidentiality issues or unprofessional behaviour online. It is important to adhere to professional guidance (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) 2012) and to be familiar with local employer guidelines. Tweets are permanent and public. My rule of thumb is if I wouldn't say it openly at work then I don't say it in a tweet.

Continuing professional development

Now that I am using Twitter I can see many benefits including utilising Twitter activity for evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) in accordance with NMC standards (NMC 2011). From the end of 2015, revalidation will strengthen systems requiring that midwives collect evidence from CPD activities for revalidation every three years (Royal College of Nursing (RCN) 2014). With less time and increased work pressures, midwives are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve evidence of appropriate, interesting and relevant CPD through traditional methods like attending courses. As training budgets are squeezed and trusts prioritise in-house

mandatory learning, innovative, flexible CPD strategies are needed. The good news is that Twitter is evolving as a useful CPD tool (Moorley and Chinn 2014). WeCommunities is a platform for a growing number of Twitter health care communities. WeMidwives is one of those communities. They hold structured discussions on predefined topics which are then published on their webpage. The discussions facilitate sharing knowledge and information on midwifery practice or policy which can contribute to CPD.

Conferences and hashtags

While there are some great conferences and courses, we can't all go to them. But those who do attend can share their experience and their learning quickly and effectively through Twitter. Conference hashtags are a great way to follow all the people tweeting from a conference. The hashtag is a way of making things more searchable. If you tweet about a conference you are at and include the hashtag with assigned conference 'code' in the tweet, then when people search that hashtag they will see all the tweets relevant to that conference.

The bigger picture

Twitter enables practitioners to develop a global perspective. The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) uses Twitter to increase awareness of their international work promoting midwifery for safer childbirth around the world. This is a powerful way of opening up the world of midwifery. Having a national and global view helps midwives gain perspective in maternity care. Importantly it connects individuals to a worldwide 'family' of midwives. It has made me feel more connected and increased my sense of what it is to be a midwife. Recent work on resilience in midwifery has identified that feeling

connected to others who can support your work, and having a strong sense of professional identity and pride, are associated with resilience in midwives (Hunter and Warren 2014).

Social media also offer midwives access to service user perspectives. There are groups where women can tweet about an array of subjects including birth choices, breastfeeding and postnatal depression. All of these offer insight into women's experiences of childbirth; rich pickings for enquiring midwives who want to know more about providing woman-centred care.

Give it a go

What I have found in Twitter is a vibrant, engaged and supportive community of midwives, healthcare professionals and service users who have shared and enhanced my understanding of compassion and many other

I have found a vibrant, engaged and supportive community of midwives, healthcare professionals and service users who have shared and enhanced my understanding of compassion and many other aspects of midwifery

aspects of midwifery. If you already use Twitter professionally then you may already be networking with me and other tweeting midwives. If you don't then I hope I have persuaded you to look at my tips for getting started on Twitter (See *Table 1*) and try it. [tpm](#)

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