



# *TWITTER* for HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

*An Introductory Guide  
Learn How to Tweet &  
Why You Should Consider  
Doing So*

## Explore This Guide

Introduction	1
What is Twitter?	2
Twitter Talk	2
How Do I Get Started?	3
10 Things to Keep in Mind While Tweeting	4
Frequently Asked Questions	5



**BC PATIENT SAFETY  
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**Social media** initially began as a tool for personal communication and included platforms such as Facebook, blogging, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube. More recently, social media has seen an explosion in its use by organizations and other professional-focused tools have come on to the scene including LinkedIn and email newsletter software such as MailChimp. This fast growth has created an opportunity for organizations to deliver information directly to people who want to receive it, without having to purchase advertising, hope for media coverage, etc.

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**IF YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA** as part of your organization's approach to communication or as an individual in terms of your professional role, this guide can help you use Twitter to build and strengthen the reputation of both your organization and your area of work. It will provide you with tips on what kind of content to tweet and even how to do so.

In short, Twitter can help you amplify your message by reaching your target audiences more easily and quickly than by only using traditional communications methods. It also provides an opportunity to reach audiences that you normally wouldn't have had access to or traditionally included in targeted communications.

Twitter is an effective tool to help you and your organization engage with colleagues; disseminate important and timely news and resources to large audiences; increase awareness of issues; and build and strengthen networks. For example, at the Council we use Twitter to:

- 1 Grow and engage the Council's networks;
- 2 Advance the Council's mandate and vision;
- 3 Increase awareness of the Council's work; and
- 4 Celebrate achievement of the Council and its partners.

## What is Twitter?

Twitter is a social network that enables users to write and read online posts (known as “tweets”) that are limited to 140 characters. This free service has over 500 million active users who generate over 340 million tweets and 1.6 billion search queries per day. It has also become one of the top 10 most visited sites on the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

**Twitter Talk.** Here is some popular Twitter lingo:

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**TWEET** : a post on Twitter (similar to a blog post, email or text message – just shorter!).

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**HANDLE** : Think of a short word for the username you will create when signing up for an account.

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**@ SYMBOL** : used before a handle to identify accounts (e.g. in real life you'd say, “Hi Helen Bevan.” On Twitter this would be “Hi @helenbevan.”). Just like an email address, if you write the handle wrong or forget the @, the person will never know you tweeted about him/her.

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**RT (SHORT FOR “RE-TWEET”)** : a tweet that shares what someone else has tweeted (like forwarding an email). As an example, here is how a tweet from @WorldSepsisDay might get re-tweeted : “Can’t Wait! RT @WorldSepsisDay: Sept 13 is World Sepsis Day, click here to find out more <http://ow.ly/bScC1>”

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**# SYMBOL** : a “hashtag” is used to organize information so that it is easy to find. For instance, if you’re tweeting about stroke you could type “#stroke” in your tweet. Someone looking for information on stroke could then search for “#stroke” and see what the world is talking about on the subject. There are numerous hashtags that are commonly used but you can also create your own as well. Try searching “#healthcare” or if you’re in BC “#bchc” (BC health care) and see what comes up!

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**TRENDING** : this occurs when a hashtag is used so often that it becomes one of the most popular conversations in the world or a specified country.

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**DM (SHORT FOR “DIRECT MESSAGE”)** : you can send a private message to someone on Twitter – but only if that person is following you. To do so, start your tweet with “d” and then the person’s handle. For example, “d bcpsqc that link in your previous tweet didn’t work; you may want to try again.” Keep in mind that if you put the @ symbol in front of the handle, your DM will not work.

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**TWEETUP** : a meetup of Twitter-using individuals or those interested in Twitter who usually share a common interest.

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**How Do I Get Started?**

*Here are the 8 steps to get you set up on Twitter  
(nothing to fear - it's easy!)*

<b>1</b>	Create a profile on <a href="http://www.twitter.com">www.twitter.com</a> (it's free).
<b>2</b>	Think of a short Twitter handle that describes you best. Stay away from using numbers or underscores and try to keep it fewer than 15 characters. Don't worry if you cannot decide on one - it's very easy to change your handle at any time
<b>3</b>	Upload a photo to your Twitter profile.
<b>4</b>	Write a short description of yourself on your Twitter Profile.
<b>5</b>	Follow those that interest you. This includes organizations (for those of us in BC, here are some examples: @bcpsqc @VCHhealthcare, @Providence_Hlth, @Fraserhealth, @VanIslandHealth, @Interior_Health, @Northern_Health, @VanIslandHealth) and people (@ck4q @helenbevan @tweetvandijk @ajay4quality). And you can find others by checking out who is using hashtags like #healthcare or #bhc.
<b>6</b>	Now you're ready to send out your first tweet!
<b>7</b>	When in doubt about how and what to tweet, refer to your organization's guidelines on using Twitter and social media.
<b>8</b>	See how others write tweets and learn from them.

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### More Online Resources

Watch Twitter's video tutorial series

Read Twitter's getting started guide

Want to learn more about Twitter? Check out our Twitter 101 presentation file!

Mashable's Twitter Guide

The Ultimate Guide for Everything Twitter

The 5 1/2 Best Twitter Practices Infographic

## 10 Things to Keep in Mind While Tweeting

<b>1</b>	People are more apt to value your tweets if they include relevant and interesting content.
<b>2</b>	Be two-way. Ask questions. Make tweets engaging and informative. Feel free to crowd-source for information/feedback. The point is to be engaging.
<b>3</b>	We recommend writing tweets of 120 or fewer characters so that people have room to add a message when they re-tweet you! If you have a lot to say, break it up into several tweets rather than one long one.
<b>4</b>	Provide credit for sourced info (mention those involved in an event, article, etc. and/or who produced the info) – this will help you get your content out to a larger audience because the source might re-tweet you.
<b>5</b>	Tweet as little or as frequently as you like (i.e. 1 tweet every couple of days is okay and so is 10 tweets an hour – it's up to you and the content you'd like to share).
<b>6</b>	Tweet "@" people. Have conversations with your followers. It pays to have twitter fans. You can mention partners or other organizations – they might re-tweet you or start a conversation. Include your team members' Twitter handles when needing to bring something to their attention or start a conversation.
<b>7</b>	Use hashtags (e.g. #bchc #healthcare), but try not to overuse them (you don't want to wear out your welcome).
<b>8</b>	Schedule tweets to provide a framework for discussion throughout the day and to avoid spamming your followers (Hootsuite is a great tool that can help you do this easily). Often, conversations will emerge organically; try to respond in a timely manner. The best time to tweet is in the afternoon.
<b>9</b>	Provide links (usually placed in the middle or end of a tweet). 57% of all re-tweets include a link. <sup>2</sup>
<b>10</b>	Try to use "proper grammar" as much as possible. Avoid abbreviations such as "gr8" or "u".

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How many people should I follow?**

That's up to you! But there are some things to keep in mind. Ideally, the number of people following you should be close to the number of people you follow. There are a few reasons for this:

*If the number of people you follow is way higher than the number of people who follow you, people might worry that your account is set up to spam them with advertising and decide not to follow you.*

*If the number of people you follow is way lower than the number of people who follow you, people might think that you only pump out information and don't care about forming a connection. And yes, people care about the number of followers they have, so if they see that you will not follow them back if they follow you, they might not bother to do so in the first place.*

### **What should I tweet about?**

Great content includes updates and highlights on your projects, success stories, quotes that inspire you, information that amazes you, or something you learned and can't wait to start doing. Feel free to also take photos and tweet them as well. Refer to the 10 Things to Keep in Mind When Tweeting or the 5 1/2 Best Twitter Practices for more ideas.

Twitter is also a great way to generate conversations at a conference by encouraging participants to include a specific hashtag in their tweets. For example, at our Social Media Camp, so many people tweeted with the hashtag #SocialMediaCamp that it became one of the most popular conversations in Canada (it "trended"). This also allows people who cannot attend a conference to follow along from home.

### **How can Twitter support efforts to improve quality of care?**

Briefly, we believe that Twitter is a great way to distribute information and build on the reputation of your organization as a trusted source of information. It provides opportunities to share success stories and engage others in our efforts to improve care. As well, Twitter helps to educate others by letting them know about new resources. We can also keep our partners and colleagues updated about events.

## Frequently Asked Questions Continued

### **I'm still confused. What's the difference between a direct message and a reply or mention?**

A direct message is a private message that can only be seen by the person to whom you are messaging. Write one by typing "handle message." Note that you cannot use an @ symbol before the person's handle.

**Example:** "d ck4q Great to see you yesterday! Let's get together again soon".

A reply or mention is public and functions in two ways (note that you must include the @ symbol before the person's handle):

*If you begin a tweet with @(someone's handle), it will be public and broadcast to anyone that is following both you and the person to whom you are sending the message.*

**Example:** "@Ajay4Quality I like the link you just posted – I'm going to share it with my colleagues!"

*If you mention someone in a tweet by including @(handle), it will be public and broadcast to all of your followers, and the person will be notified that you mentioned him/her.*

**Example:** "I really like the tweets that @RBheartsHC is posting – they are insightful and valuable to my work."



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*Have a question? Ask us!  
Email us at [tweet@bcpsqc.ca](mailto:tweet@bcpsqc.ca) or  
tweet us at [@bcpsqc](https://twitter.com/bcpsqc).*

*Last thing to keep in mind: have fun  
and don't be afraid to engage!*

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AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE. BC PATIENT SAFETY &  
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