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## Tweeting evidence in social care

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*Many people have been discussing the use of Twitter in social care looking at the perspectives of the wide variety of groups involved in social care, including people who use social care services, practitioners, carers and researchers, and everyone concludes that it is in fact a, if not the most effective way of starting conversation and sharing knowledge in the sector. However many people are still reluctant to jump on the Twitter bandwagon, here [Jo Moriarty](#) a researcher in social care tells us how she started her Twitter journey and the effect it has had on her work to date.*

I am a bit apprehensive about writing this. As someone who has only been on Twitter for about six months, I still feel very much of a novice but I'm increasingly convinced there are lots of ways in which it can be used to share – and perhaps create ideas – about evidence in social care.

To start with a confession, I first joined Twitter because as a researcher working in a university I am encouraged to use social media to spread news of the research projects and activities I am working on. After ensuring I had read the '[How to post a tweet](#)' guide helpfully provided by Twitter I eventually felt brave enough to reference a link to Linda Pickard's article on the [relationship between paid and unpaid care](#), which had kept me entertained on the train home. My initial intentions for joining Twitter were purely academic, but I haven't always been able to maintain such an intellectual standard of tweeting. Very few days go in which I do not post a tweet and even fewer in which I don't read the tweet's of those I follow on my timeline.

Before I started using Twitter, and when everyone around me was encouraging me to do so I couldn't help but think that it would just take up too much time, which could be spent other (do I say more important?) research related activities. I would imagine especially for those working in social care this would be an even harder feat as research shows that many social care practitioners regularly do unpaid overtime in addition to their usual working hours.

### So why add to an already overloaded workload?

For me Twitter isn't about creating an additional workload, but making your current work more informed. The argument for evidence based practice and policy has been around for a long time in social care, but Twitter is a tool that can help bring this all together in an easy and accessible manner.

Organisations such as universities and third sector organisations increasingly use Twitter to publicise their work, you can even find out about the current work of various Government departments. By following these organisations and other practitioners, service users, carers and other people interested in social care, you create for yourself a personal knowledge hub, in which you can assemble evidence and discussion on current topical issues in social care.

One of the advantages of Twitter is that you can follow events as they happen. The day before the latest Francis report into Mid Staffordshire NHS trust was released, media organisations posted tweets about their planned coverage of it. As news of the report emerged over the day, members of the public, practitioners, campaigning organisations, and commentators began tweeting their reactions. Some have criticised this 'live' coverage of events as they happen, referring to it as 'trial by Twitter'. While it is true that some comments on social media are often not particularly considered and may even be inaccurate, it is incredibly powerful to see different groups of people talking about the same subject in ways that could not have happened with traditional print and broadcast journalism. As yet, we do not know about how these sort of discussions impact on policy, or indeed if they do, but anything that increases transparency about such terrible events or makes organisations or individuals feel more accountable should surely be regarded as positive.

Although they do take time to get used to, the # (hashtag) signs, can also be useful. They are a way of categorising tweets so it's easier to find what people have tweeted about a particular topic. Recently I read a report about people of working age with a disability. I'd heard the coverage earlier on the news but the arresting '#freethe100k' on tweets from [@Scope](#) meant that I actually read the report, rather than meaning to but failing to get round to it. They also let you follow discussions taking place at events that you are attending, or would like to attend. It allows for an environment where you can learn and listen to others, but also discuss the issues coming up as they happen.

As well as publicising traditional reports or journal articles, Twitter can also be used to link to other types of media. In 2012, Shirley Ayres [@shirleyayres](#) and Stuart Arnott [@MindingsStu](#) broadcast interviews with a range of people involved in social care and technology and have plans to run more. Gill Phillips's [@WhoseShoes](#) blog features content from her and other

bloggers, mainly about dementia. Gill's mum has even been known to contribute, showing that Twitter is crossing generation boundaries.

### Curating Tweets

It's even easier to follow discussions if people 'curate' tweets using apps such as [storify](#). For example, [@mithransamuel](#) has collected tweets about the advantages and disadvantages of returning to a ratings system for social care.

No time to read a link when it is posted? Just 'favorite' the tweet (Twitter Inc is based in San Francisco, hence the US spelling) and you can retrieve it later.

### Expanding boundaries

In social care, we're familiar with the idea of different sorts of evidence; the argument that while research constitutes one form of evidence, the experience of practitioners and people using services and carers is also important. [The Knowledge Review](#) published by [@SCIE\\_socialcare](#) has been very influential here. It strikes me that Twitter is quite a democratic forum in that practitioners, researchers, people using services and carers might all take part in the same discussions. There are so many Twitter users (or tweeps), I'd like to mention here but Norman McNamara [@Norrms](#), a man with dementia, and Helen Jones [@dementia\\_tch](#), a family carer, always amaze me with their useful, and often very moving, links to other resources. Sometimes groups of people or organisations take this process a step further by hosting discussions at set times. SWSCMedia [@SWSCMedia](#) have discussed issues as far apart as gun control and the proposed frontline scheme for training social workers.

It's often said that devolution has led to greater diversity in social care across the UK. Arrangements for funding long term personal care in Scotland are famously not the same as in England but [PSSRU](#) research into direct payments shows there are other differences too. I like the way that Twitter helps me know what's happening in social care outside England. The Office of the Older People's Commissioner for Wales [@talkolderpeople](#), Carers Northern Ireland [@CarersNI](#), Rights 4 Seniors [@rights4Seniors](#) Fiona Collie [@tartan1314](#), and Thomas Whitelaw [@Tommyntour](#) are among my favorite tweeters from other parts of the UK while [@SocialJerkBlog](#) is a wondrously iconoclastic social worker based in The Bronx. For some people, tweeting anonymously means they can be franker than if they are identifiable by name.

Six months ago, I would never have imagined that Twitter could be so useful for work. But then neither would I have imagined that following people's tweets could be so much fun too!

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