

Intro: Since the rise in tuition fees the value of the student experience has become more important than ever. Difficult areas of medical programmes like neuroanatomy can often be pre-perceived by students as overly challenging and unenjoyable, potentially stunting student engagement with course material. As Twitter has been used in higher education to increase engagement and offer a supportive online community for the learning of challenging subjects, we incorporated it into the neuroanatomy module at the University of Southampton. We investigated how much value students place on having a supportive network when undertaking difficult subjects and how this would impact on the learning experience.

Methods: The nlm2soton hashtag was created for a cohort of 197 medical students studying neuroanatomy. Students completed an end of module questionnaire and a focus group was conducted to deduce how Twitter impacted the learning experience and exam performance.

Results: 91% of the cohort used the hashtag. 58% simply viewed while the extra 33% contributed to tweet activity. 3 dominant tweet themes were identified as follows: Sharing learning ideas, Morale boosts and Questions and feedback. Students valued how Twitter made communicating with lecturers easier, created a supportive network and a sense of anxiety relief. There was no statistical relationship between frequency of Twitter engagement and exam performance.

Conclusions: We found that Twitter can be successfully used to create an inclusive and informal supportive networking space for students to engage in group learning. The sense of support and anxiety relief that students felt from being part of this online community was highly valued and ultimately enhanced the student learning experience.