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## Breast cancer patients use Twitter as a non-medical forum to share their experiences

*Lugano/Munich (ots) -*

Twitter is a place where many cancer patients share and discuss their experiences, a study at the ESMO 2018 Congress reveals, based on analysis of the contents of over 6,000 tweets and retweets about breast cancer.

The study was part of a larger, multidisciplinary project to observe the presence of different diseases on social media. The data collected included 3,703 original tweets and 2,638 retweets.

When examining the original tweets, it was found that only one in three had medical content. However, 90% of this medical information was appropriate, likely owed to the fact that 40% of tweets came from institutions and public accounts. The categorisation of tweets by aim showed that the most frequent motive was patients sharing their experiences, followed closely by patient advocacy. The most common subtheme by far was prevention (44.5% of tweets).

Out of the 2,559 non-medical tweets analysed, less than 15% contained stigmatising statements about the disease.

"These initial findings may prove useful," said Rodrigo Sánchez-Bayona, Clínica Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. "Social media can be used as a new way of providing information on cancer prevention and health education - not just to patients, but to a much broader audience."

Marina Garassino, Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan, Italy, for ESMO: "This analysis illustrates the presence of patients in large numbers on Twitter. We should take that as corroboration of a new reality: patients use the web to find information, and social media must be an integral part of our communication with them. Academic institutions and key opinion leaders need to be even more active in spreading their findings through these channels to counteract the many 'fake news' circulating online."

Full story: <https://bit.ly/2yxa2QF>

ESMO is the leading professional organisation for medical oncology. With 18,000 members representing oncology professionals from over 150 countries worldwide, ESMO is the society of reference for oncology education and information.

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