

Social Work Pulse

Elizabeth Smith: Social workers can use online comments, social media to make impact



Elizabeth A. Smith, LCSW,
ACSW

The *New York Times* on August 15 featured an editorial piece called **To Know Suicide: Depression can be treated but it takes competence** that came amid the heavy media coverage of the suicide of comedian and actor Robin Williams.

I was very moved by this piece by a well-known psychiatrist who is herself bipolar and works at John Hopkins Hospital. So I decided to write an online comment based on my current job as a private practice social worker and psychotherapist in Scottsdale, Ariz.

My comment expressed my view that not enough of my clients go to psychiatrists for medication but instead visit family doctors who may not be trained in medical options. I think family members should also be told what to expect and how to help their loved ones.

My comment was just one of about 200. So I was surprised it garnered the reaction it did.

Several weeks later a flurry of doctors from Northern California retweeted the piece and comments that I retweeted to my twitter account. Stanford University ²⁵, a medical school, website and two medical professionals are following me and the article was favorited by another doctor website as

well.

The intention I had to respond to this and retweet it to my twitter account showed me (after doing this with other articles from the *New York Times* for my clients to have access to for years) that using social media can be another way to influence others and make a big difference in the mental health, health care and other fields.

You can learn more about Elizabeth A. Smith at her website, elizabethannsmith.com.

I have long had an interest in writing going back to the 1990's when I had the idea of combining journalism and social work. In 1995 an editor of a newspaper in Manassas, Va. liked the idea and worked with me to write an opinion piece about the recession. It was called *Nouveau Poor*. Another newspaper in the area liked the idea and did a similar article, the editor at the Manassas paper told me.

I later sent an editorial to the *Washington Post* opinion section about a social worker's view of how middle class people were going to food pantries and getting welfare and how we should all be concerned. The *Washington Post* assistant editor liked it and tried me out for several opinion articles.

I encourage other social workers to write and show our experiences on the front line of pressing social issues of the day.

We have much to offer in terms of expressing our opinions on so many avenues that often are in the news. Social workers can comment on a variety of issues, including violence in schools, medical or psychological issues and current events.

Letters to the editor are another way to make a difference and get our opinions and influence out there. Social media now offers many other creative ways like never before.

- **National Association of Social Workers member Elizabeth A. Smith, LCSW, ACSW**