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# Social Media: Opportunities to Enhance Communication and Collaboration Between Allied Health and Other Primary Health Care Professionals

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## INTRODUCTION

- Social media is becoming increasingly popular in education and health care.[1]
- Principles of open access, user-generated content and networking are central and provide an exciting new way to deliver health information and build partnerships.[1]

## HOW DO ALLIED HEALTH AND OTHER PRIMARY HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS CURRENTLY USE SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES?

### Social and professional networking

- Users with shared interests or backgrounds connect to others through group-forming applications[2]
- Personal information or 'profiles' can be shared amongst network members[2]
- Facebook (http://www.facebook.com) is primarily used for social interactions
- Businesses, non-profit organisations and professional peak bodies increasingly use Facebook for promotion and networking
- Example: A group established by Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health Inc (SARRAH) provides an open forum for members and encourages professional networking (Figure 1).
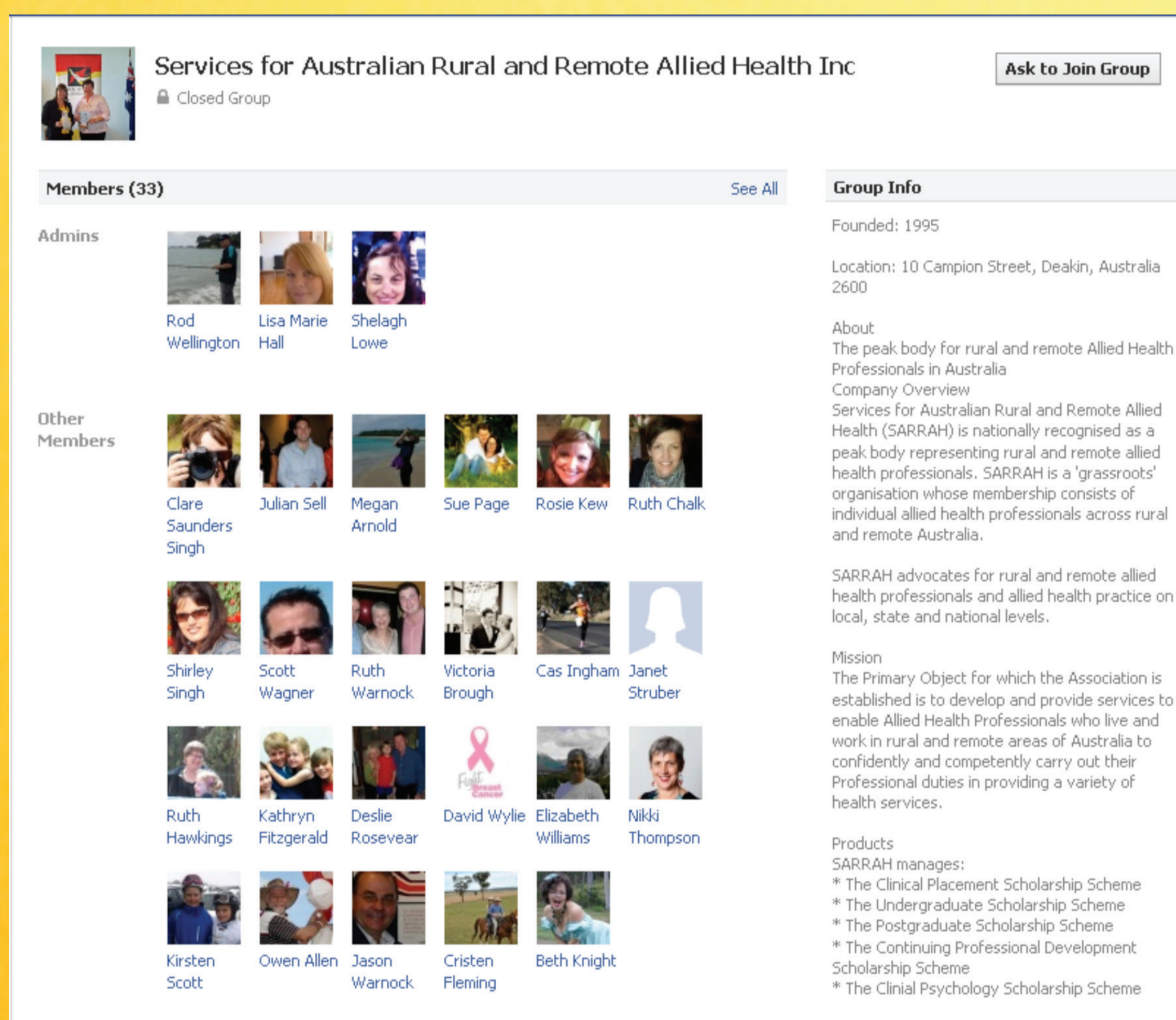


**Figure 1:** Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health Inc: https://www.facebook.com/groups/sarrah/

- LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com), which is mainly used for professional networking, is gaining popularity among academics and health professionals
- Groups enable members to engage with fellow professionals
- Example: The Australian Pharmacists group was created to facilitate information sharing and networking among members (Figure 2).
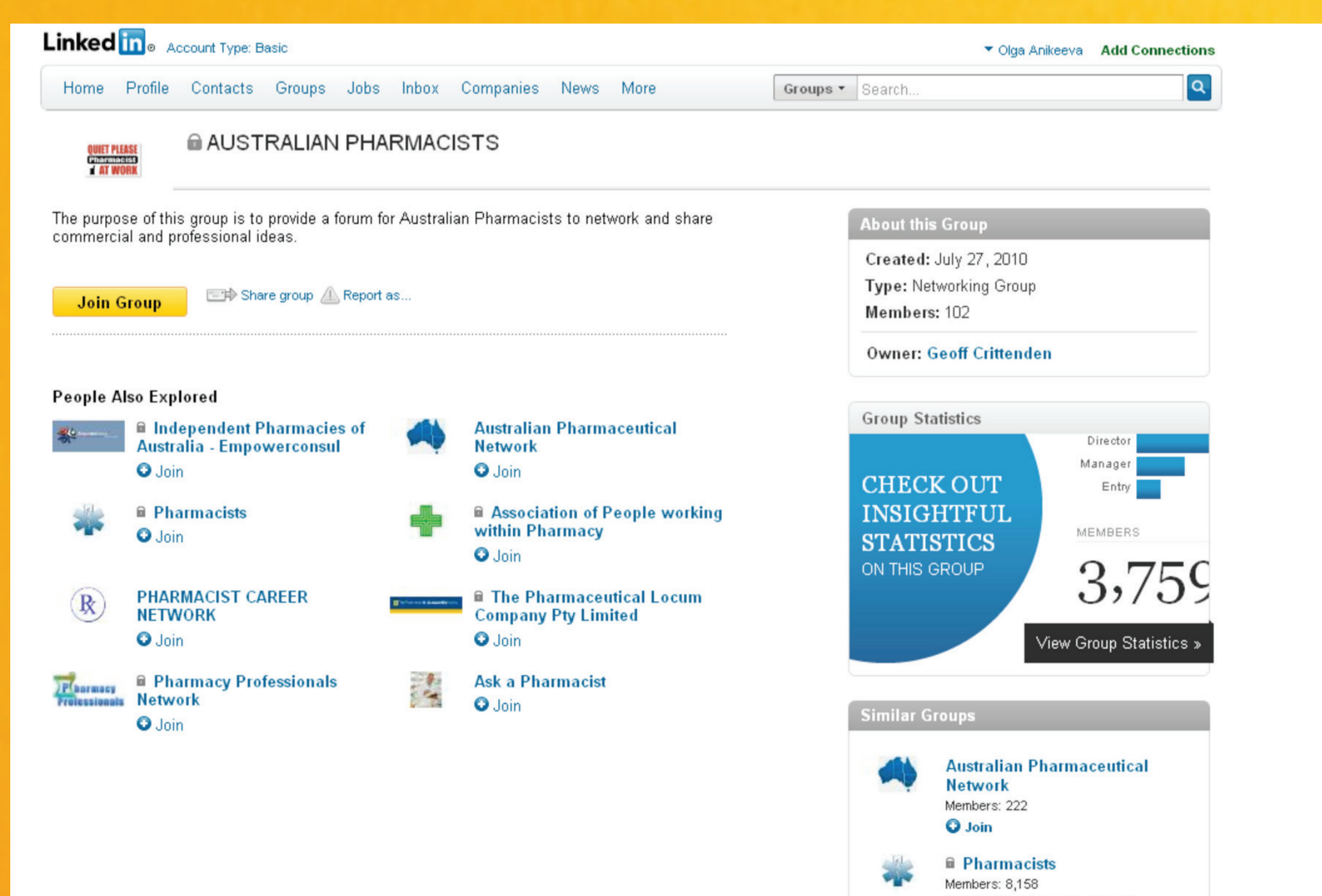


**Figure 2:** Australian Pharmacists: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3255867&trk=anet_ug_hm

## WIKIS

- Online page or series of documents, where participants collaborate on projects by adding, editing and sharing information[2; 3]
- Popular in health education, as it supports active engagement in problem solving activities
- The collaborative nature of this tool provides reliable quality control (outdated or inaccurate information is rapidly edited by the community of users)[2; 3]
- Accuracy depends on the size of the community, their expertise and the frequency of their engagement with the tool.
- Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org) is the most widely-known Wiki
- Numerous Wikis have been created specifically for allied health professionals
- Example: The Psychology Wiki is a dynamic information resource for professionals and consumers interested in psychology (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Psychology Wiki: http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page

## BLOGS AND MICROBLOGS

- Content-management tools, with information presented in reverse-chronological order[2]
- Blog networks are formed when users link to other blogs focusing on the same topic, enabling easy navigation[2]
- Provide opportunities for allied health and other primary health care professionals to share information and build new connections
- Example: The Biting the Dust blog presents information, opinion and discussion about pharmacy in remote Australia (Figure 4).
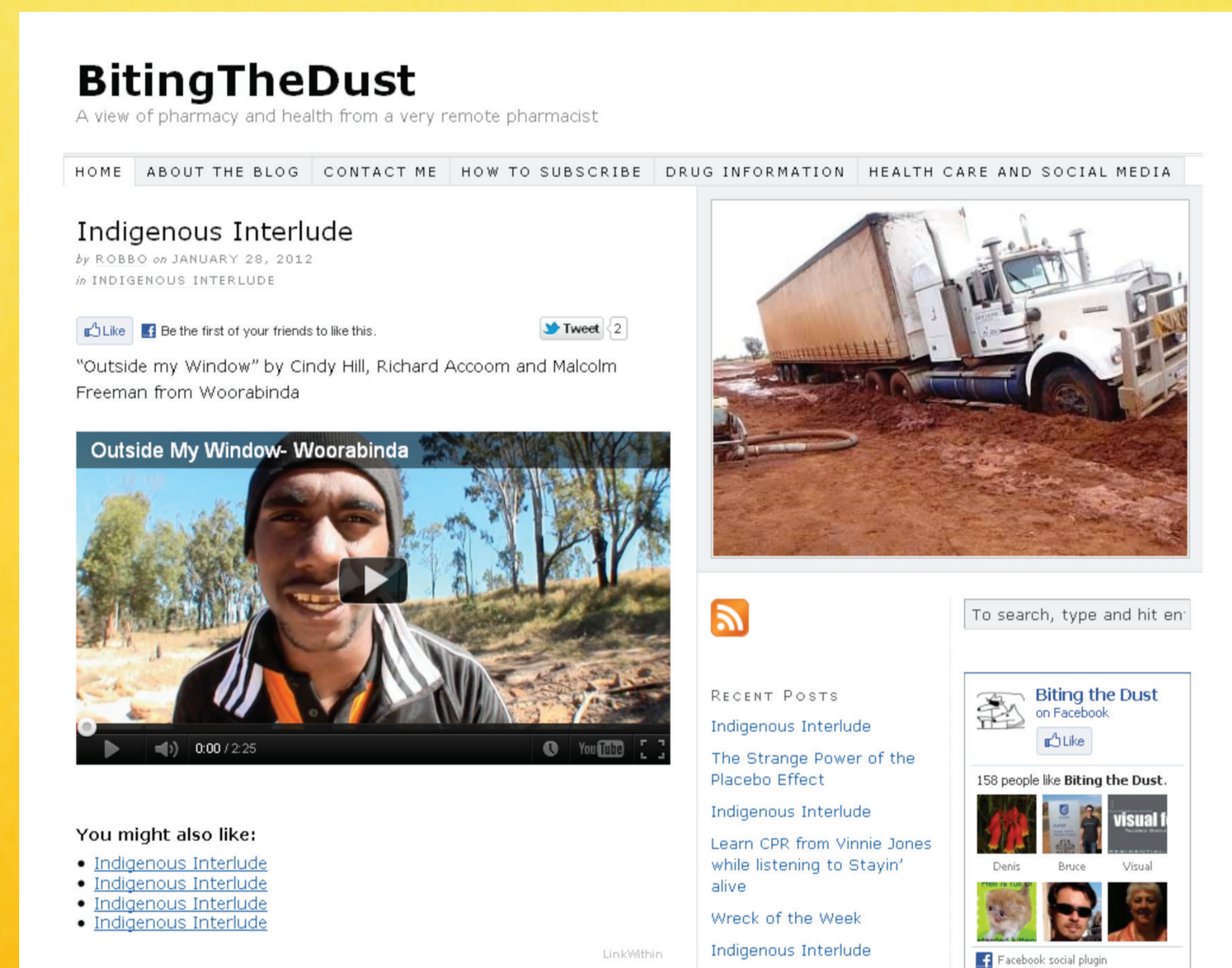


**Figure 4:** Biting the Dust blog: http://bitethedust.com.au/bitingthedust/

- Microblogging is a similar concept, with briefer entries
- Twitter (http://www.twitter.com), which imposes a 140 character limit on each entry, is widely used[4; 5]
- Particularly suited to time-poor professionals, who can judge whether a topic is relevant to them from 140 characters
- Used to disseminate conference updates,[4; 5] providing a real-time account that may be useful for geographically isolated professionals
- Example: The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists keeps followers updated about policy changes, news and recent developments (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists: https://twitter.com/#!/RANZCP

## CURRENT LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

- Australian allied health professionals utilise social media for personal use, but not for professional purposes[6]
- Barriers include lack of comprehensive training, concerns about increase in workload and preference for the traditional approach to collaboration
- Concerns about privacy[2] limit the utility of social networking (difficult to form connections if users hide information from their searchable profile)
- Anyone is able to upload and edit information, which may compromise accuracy[2]
- Users can remain anonymous, making it difficult to judge the credibility of content.[4]

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Ongoing training and support are essential
- Allied health professionals have expressed willingness to undertake educational courses delivered online[6]
- Busy professionals do not have time to use tools that need to be opened in separate windows and operated differently[4]
- Tools could be integrated into one application, which can be customised according to need
- If barriers are successfully addressed, these technologies have great potential for increasing and improving communication and collaboration between allied health and other primary health care professionals.

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