

Meet Dana Brems, DPM, TikTok Star

She harnesses the power of social media to promote podiatry, healthful practices, and women's issues—and to have fun!

BY ANDREA LINNE

During the weekend, after a busy schedule working as a second-year podiatric resident at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center in Long Beach, CA, Dana Brems, DPM, finds time to make some TikTok videos. With the TikTok app downloaded on her iPhone, she places the phone on a tripod by the window, which provides good light, and taps the Plus button at the bottom of the screen to create a 15-second video. Then she edits the video, adding text and music and sometimes dubbing in voices. “I tend to make multiple videos over the weekend and save them to my draft,” Dr. Brems says. “Then I post one a day or at least one a few times a week. I also upload the videos to my Instagram Reels account.”

Dr. Brems, who began posting still photos on Instagram two years ago, has been active on TikTok since November 2019. “I go by ‘footdocdana’ because many young people don’t know what a podiatrist is,” she says. “My message is always evolving, but one goal is to raise awareness of podiatry. I also encourage young women to be strong and independent and to do whatever they want, including becoming a doctor. And I think it’s important, especially these days, to share correct information, including that

people shouldn’t be scared to get the COVID-19 vaccine.”

But what’s garnered Dr. Brems over one million followers on TikTok and more than 100 thousand followers on Instagram is that her videos are entertaining. In 2020, Trendalytics, a firm that uses predictive data to transform the way retailers make decisions, named her one of

take my job seriously but also love finding the humor in daily life. I’ve always considered myself an introvert, but have been able to connect with and help more people than I ever would’ve thought possible a year ago. I’ve learned that being a little different and making our own path isn’t just OK, but something to be celebrated!”

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10 top influencers among medical professionals, stating that Dr. Brems “shares her passion for medicine, fitness, and comedy across her social media accounts.” Dr. Brems was also one of 100 doctors celebrated in a Dr. Mike YouTube video that addressed the truth about battling coronavirus. “I was doctor number 99,” she says. In response to the question, “What gives you hope,” Dr. Brems said, “Healthcare professionals everywhere are stepping up instead of backing down.”

Last year, Dr. Brems introduced herself to new followers saying, “I

Typically dressed in scrubs, Dr. Brems’ big smile, expressive eyes and sometimes incredulous looks set the tone for each video. “I’m never at a loss for topics, she says. “I have a list in my notes app. Whenever an idea pops into my head, I write it down so I don’t forget it. My videos are made for anyone, but they are especially liked by healthcare workers in general.

To make videos that are entertaining or inspirational, the most important thing is to be relatable. Think about how your post will

Continued on page 60

TikTok Star (from page 59)

make the viewer feel. Is the underlying theme a relatable human emotion? When I make an educational video, I try to present a new idea in a way that's both succinct and understandable to the average person. When I pick music to put over my videos, I usually choose the latest trending songs that are upbeat and from the pop genre. But I'm careful to not use any audio that has graphic or offensive lyrics."

Dr. Brems' "surgeon challenge" video went viral with more than 17 million views and 3 million



Figure 1: Dr. Brems' surgeon challenge

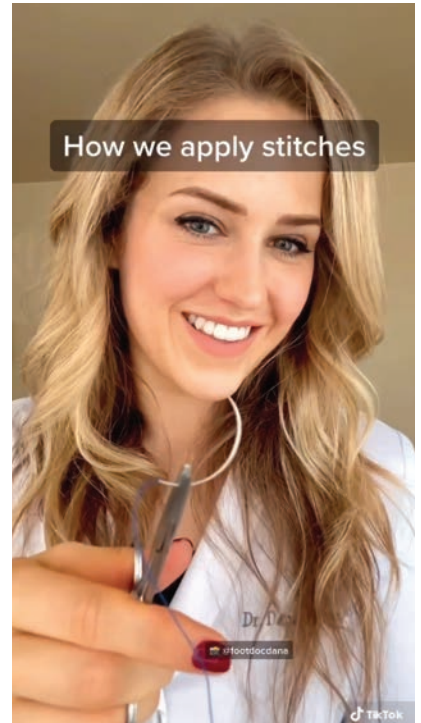


Figure 2A: Followers like how-to demos.



Figure 2: "Saw my ex after 10 years. 'Miss or Mrs?' he asked."

likes. "I was holding my hands still for 15 seconds to show I could be a surgeon," she says. "I think it went viral because so many people were fascinated with the concept and did it—and they posted my video next to their video." (Figure 1) Reacting to the overwhelming response, Dr. Brems created another video in which a dubbed-in voice-over asks, "Dude, how do you feel?" and she responds with an image of *Grey's Anatomy*.

The lack of acknowledgement of women doctors is a common theme. In one video, in which Dr. Brems is dressed in a white coat with a stethoscope around her neck, a voice asks, "Excuse me, do you work here?" Her response, "Nah, just a huge fan." While she's made several videos celebrating nurses, others point out that female doctors are often mistaken for nurses because of their gender. In another post, with the lyrics—"I'm right over here why can't you see me" from the song "Dancing on My Own," which plays in the background—Dr. Brems added the text:

then press on that. I take some bone that I don't think is lined up nice and then break it and nail it back together. Sometimes I shoot people with laser."

In a more serious video, Dr. Brems explains what brachymet is and how it can be surgically

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"When a patient always talks to the male med student instead of you." But her self-respect is evident in the video in which she celebrates National Women Physicians Day. "Saw my ex after 10 years. 'Miss or Mrs?' he asked. 'Doctor,' I replied." (Figure 2)

Short how-to demos are another staple for videos—from tying shoe laces to doing stitches and surgery and scraping dead skin from a patient's foot. (Figure 2A) When asked to "poorly describe your job or specialty," Dr. Brems says: "I touch people's feet. I ask where it hurts and

corrected. (Figure 3) "I do some light-podiatry-related educational videos," she says. "But I err on the side of caution. I don't want to seem like I'm giving medical advice. I also don't use any clinical images of my patients, since I'm a resident and they're not 'my' patients. When I am a practicing podiatrist, I'll probably do more podiatry-specific material to display my competency."

Dr. Brems made several mask videos when the CDC first recommended wearing them. "I wanted

Continued on page 63

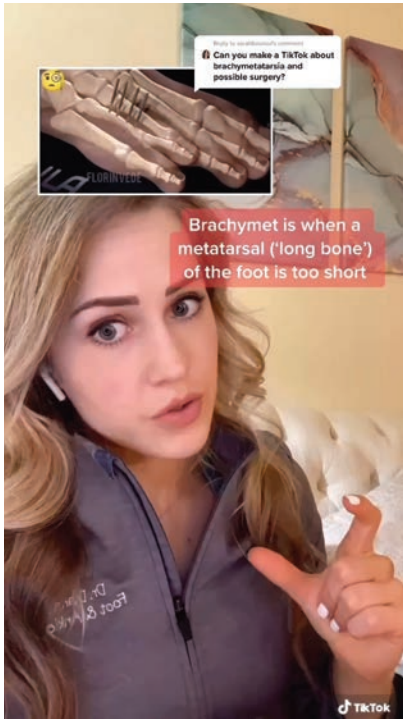


Figure 3: Educational videos promote podiatry.

TikTok Star (from page 60)

to show my viewers that I believe in wearing masks—correctly—to prevent the spread of this virus,” she says. “One of them was a light-hearted ‘how not to wear a mask’ video, in which I nicknamed all the

some so-called healthy yogurt brands (Figure 4).

Dr. Brems joyfully posted her experience getting the COVID-19 vaccination. She did a follow-up video discussing that her arm was a little sore but she didn’t have any of the other common side effects (Figure 5). And she responded to a follower who asked, “How much did they pay you to say all this?” In the video, she opens her laptop and says, “Checking my bank account after posting a vaccine video: I see no changes.”

“There is a lot of vaccine hesitancy with the COVID vaccine,” Dr. Brems says. “I can understand why some people are hesitant to take a new vaccine. I made my recent videos to help demystify it. My hope is that enough of the general public will take the vaccine once it’s available to them, even if they were hesitant earlier. This is in stark contrast to true anti-vaxxers, who are against all vaccines because of widely disproven claims of harm, such as autism. True anti-vaxx groups take particular aim at any doctor who promotes vaccination, particularly childhood vaccines. One of the worst cases I’ve seen is a pediatrician who made a simple video saying, ‘vaccines pre-



Figure 4: Dr. Brems calls out yogurt brands that have a lot of sugar.

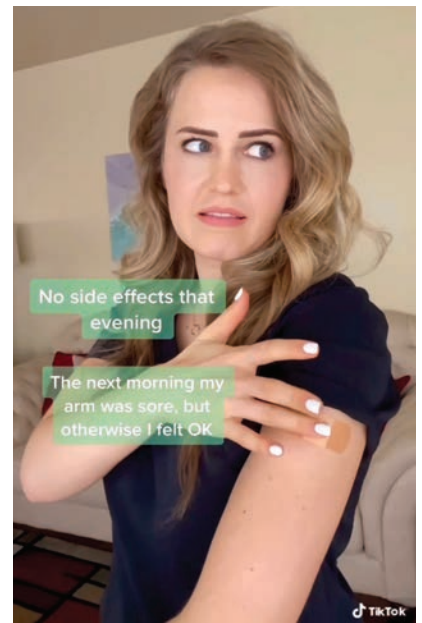


Figure 5: Dr. Brems gets the COVID-19 vaccination.

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incorrect ways people wear masks, such as the nose-out style that I called peek-a-boo. I think humor can be an effective way to get my more serious points across. I also made some straightforward videos including one on how to prevent glasses from fogging with a mask and another on the correct way to wear a mask, based on CDC recommendations.”

Dr. Brems also uses her platform to promote mindful eating. In one video, she demonstrated the hidden sugar in BBQ sauce, and in another she exposed the “sneakiest” sugar in

vent mumps, measles, rubella and tetanus.’ The video was re-posted in anti-vaxx Facebook groups, and the pediatrician quickly got thousands of hate comments, hundreds of 1-star Yelp reviews, and more negative feedback. These people were fueled by echo chambers of misinformation online—it is the dark side of internet virality, no pun intended.”

Dr. Brems does have some advice for podiatrists who are considering social media. “Instagram photos and Facebook are the platforms that put you in front of your estab-

lished followers,” she says. “On the other hand, TikTok and Instagram Reels have relatively high potential for virality if it’s a video with a broad appeal.” But, she adds, “it’s not necessary to have a huge number of followers. Show your patients what you do and what you’re good at. For example, post before and after photos of bunion surgery, with a comment about how well the

Continued on page 64

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

TikTok Star (from page 63)

patient recovered. Think about common questions you get from your patients. The general public loves behind-the-scenes content—even simple things we take for granted like videos of docs scrubbing in for surgery or what OR lights look like get millions of views. The biggest

pitfall I see is healthcare providers who accidentally make an offensive video, typically making fun of a patient. I don't think it's ever a good idea or appropriate to make public jokes, such as how patients exaggerate pain or fail to comply with their medical treatment. And, of course, any posts should be compliant with HIPAA."



Figure 6: Dr. Brems reacts to the comment, "Doctors don't belong on TikTok."

In response to a comment, "Doctors don't belong on TikTok. Stay in your lane," Dr. Brems sings and dances, "This is my lane." (Figure 6) In the end, the honesty and good nature behind the video "If you're happy and you know it..." may sum up why Dr. Brems is a social media star. "...Because you reached a follower milestone on Instagram despite the fact that no one in your real life has ever acknowledged what you do on this app. And at the end of the day you're a doctor spending your small amount of free time just sitting alone in your apartment just making videos with your phone propped by a window. Oh, and you'll probably never meet and can't even imagine those 100,000 people, but if the thought of making their days a little better with your silly videos makes you happy, clap your hands!" **PM**



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