

Can Twitter save lives?

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Discussion about cardiac arrest on Twitter is common and represents a new opportunity to provide lifesaving information to the public, according to new research from the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. The Penn investigators will present two studies (ReSS Abstracts #52 and #53) examining cardiac arrest-information exchange on the social media site today at the American Heart Association's annual Scientific Sessions.

The Penn researchers evaluated cardiac arrest- and resuscitation-related Tweets during a month-long period in the spring of 2011 and discovered that users frequently [share information](#) about [CPR](#) and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and discuss resuscitation topics in the news. Although their findings indicate that use of the platform to ask questions about [cardiac arrest](#) appears to be only in its [infancy](#), the authors suggest that Twitter represents a unique, promising avenue to respond to queries from the public and disseminate [information](#) about this leading killer – particularly in the areas of CPR training and lifesaving interventions like therapeutic hypothermia.

"Twitter is an incredible resource for connecting and mobilizing people, and it offers users a way to receive instant feedback and information. The potential applications of social media for cardiac arrest are vast," says Raina Merchant, MD, MS, an assistant professor of Emergency Medicine and a senior fellow in the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics. "Health care providers and advocacy groups can push information to the public about CPR training and best practices in cardiac arrest care, and participate in real-time discussions about cardiac

arrest issues in the media. Twitter might even be harnessed to save lives in an emergency, by allowing bystanders who respond to cardiac arrests in public places to seek information about the location of the closest AED."

In one of the new studies, the Penn researchers identified 15,324 tweets involving cardiac arrest specific information. Of those, 14 percent of tweets referenced cardiac arrest events, with 5 percent of those messages relating personal experiences with the condition (such as, "when I or a family member/friend had a cardiac arrest") and 9 percent representing users sharing information relating to arrest locations and treatment interventions and guidelines. Twenty nine percent of tweets referenced CPR performance or AED use, with 23 percent of those messages involving personal stories about real-life performance of CPR or classroom training in the technique and likes/dislikes regarding CPR/AED courses. Six percent of the CPR/AED-related messages referenced what the researchers termed "information sharing," such as observations about someone giving CPR or using an AED in a public place, or commentary about the new "hands-only" CPR guidelines for bystanders. Nearly 60 percent of the tweets related to health education – such as advocacy group and training events – and the sharing of cardiac arrest-related news articles about celebrities, athletes, and young adults affected by the condition.

In a second study, the researchers sought to understand what types of questions the public is asking about cardiac arrest on Twitter, in hopes to providing clues for how health care professionals can participate in the discussion to provide reliable information. They found that, during the month of tweets surveyed, users asked only about five questions each day. But the topics they queried about, the authors note, represent rich opportunities for public education and outreach to the broader [Twitter](#) user community. Among the cardiac arrest-related questions identified over the course of the study, 21 percent were queries about symptoms,

risk factors, prognosis, the difference between cardiac arrest and heart attack, treatment options, and the use of therapeutic hypothermia. Thirty-nine percent of question [tweets](#) identified were related to CPR, including guidelines for its use, proper technique, details about certification classes, and accuracy of media portrayal of resuscitation. Forty percent of queries pertained to AEDs – costs, device safety and batteries, availability, proper use, and effectiveness.

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

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