

Tweeting our way to heart health

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Social media sites like Twitter have the potential to enhance education, awareness and overall management of cardiovascular disease. Credit: Flickr/MDGovpics

(Medical Xpress)—Real-time social phenomenon, Twitter, can be a powerful tool to help prevent heart disease and improve health practices, according to a group of researchers affiliated with the University of Sydney.

Their study, published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, surveying 15 international health-focused [Twitter](#) accounts, nine professional organisations and six [medical journals](#), were selected for analysis of their Twitter growth, reach, and content.

The study showed that, through its inherent networking, social media sites like Twitter have the potential to enhance education, awareness and overall management of cardiovascular disease.

Lead author, Associate Professor Julie Redfern, of The George Institute for [Global Health](#), said the researchers examined the reach of health-related Tweets via the re-tweeting trend.

"The popularity and rise of Twitter has made it a readily available, free, and user-friendly tool to disseminate information rapidly to a diverse audience, for example, to engage health professionals and heart attack survivors," she said.

"In recent years, a growing number of health professionals have been using social media to share information. In a survey of 485 oncologists and physicians, 24 percent used social media at least daily to scan or explore medical information.

"[Exponential growth](#) in internet use and smart phone ownership has seen the rapid expansion of social media interfaces, such as Twitter, for rapid and global information sharing.

"We noted that Twitter is becoming increasingly popular where [Tweets](#) often include links to more detailed health information via story links, websites and photographs."

Senior author, Professor Chris Semsarian from the University of Sydney and the Centenary Institute, said recent studies had also reported

significant growth in the use of Twitter for [social networking](#) and micro-blogging about medical information, including quitting smoking and managing epileptic seizures.

"The unique ability of Twitter to disseminate critical information quickly has also been attributed to saving many lives during the recent earthquakes in Japan.

"Our study sought to investigate the growth, reach, and content of Twitter accounts for international professional organisations and prominent scientific journals associated with cardiovascular medicine."

The study illustrates the emerging role of Twitter as a medium by which cardiovascular heart information and education can be disseminated quickly, efficiently and on a worldwide scale.

The 15 Twitter accounts surveyed had a total of 674,787 followers in October 2011 and 1,318,601 followers one year later, representing a healthy mean increase of 57 percent.

And 10 of the 15 accounts experienced growth in followers of more than 50 percent individually.

Several accounts achieved a re-tweet from a user with a large number of followers. For example, the *New England Journal of Medicine* had one Tweet re-tweeted by a user with 560,000 followers.

More information: [content.onlinejacc.org/article ...
px?articleid=1676135](http://content.onlinejacc.org/article...px?articleid=1676135)

Provided by University of Sydney

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