



Press Release from Bournemouth University

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Twitter could break down health care barriers

A recent article by a Bournemouth University (BU) web professional published in the *Journal of Nursing and Healthcare of Chronic Illness* suggests that social networking website Twitter could be an effective means of delivering improved quality of life to people suffering from chronic health conditions.

Examining the rise of blogging and microblogging among practitioners, patients, and support groups, Andy Pulman from BU's School of Health & Social Care has identified Twitter, the online microblogging application, as a possible means of improving the personalised nature of health care delivery and support.

Reflecting on the evidence and use of Twitter and thinking about how it could be used in the future, Pulman feels that Twitter "could cultivate and inspire private, focused group conversations between people with chronic conditions and offer an effective targeted information channel for practitioners".

He believes current definitions concerning the integration of health information and support with Web 2.0 technology have been primarily from a health care or medical perspective and do not effectively consider how this might work from the viewpoint of the patient. However, in light of Lord Darzi's 'High Quality for All' report, health care professionals have been encouraged to provide patients with increased choice and clarity of information, while the Department of Health (DoH) has also viewed involvement and empowerment as a vital ingredient to supporting decision-making processes within the National Health Service (NHS).

Rising patient expectations, according to Pulman, are a "combined consequence of DoH and NHS policy, societal change and the increase in the use of the Internet for finding health-related information, coupled with the growth of social networking tools". Recent research has found that adults are increasingly referring to disease or situation-specific support websites and using email and social networks to discuss health issues.

It has also highlighted how the Internet now plays a key role in helping people cope with major illness.

Speaking about his paper, Pulman said: "Twitter has evolved beyond its basic functionality to provide a variety of alternate uses, some of which are health-related and which might offer opportunities in relation to improving health. I feel that the internet, mobile technology and web applications like Twitter are ideal candidates for providing innovative solutions to help deliver improved health-related quality of life. My ongoing research in this area aims to find out if this is the case."

Twitter is an online microblogging application which enables people to communicate through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one question: 'What are you doing?' Users can post – or 'tweet' – responses or link to other online resources. 'Tweeters' can form friendships which collectively establish numerous and interconnected networks of users, leading to useful professional or personal relationships.

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Note to editors:

(1) Andy Pulman's research interests concern exploring educational solutions around Web 2.0, gaming experiences, personal narratives and simulation. He started a part-time PhD in October 2008 and is also the author of the Palgrave Pocket Study Skills book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts & More*, published in August 2009. He is presenting a paper at the Handheld Learning Conference (5-7 October 2009) on how mobile technology is being used and could be used as a way of delivering improved Quality of Life.

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