

The UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, located at UMass Medical School in Worcester, MA, is a member of the CDC's Prevention Research Center (PRC) network. Our work promotes healthy lifestyles through increased opportunities for physical activity, healthy eating and healthy weight. For more information, visit: www.umassmed.edu/prc

 @umwprc

Overview

Face-to-face interventions to help people lose weight can be very expensive and time-consuming for both the counselor and the participant. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, could be an alternate way for counselors to communicate with patients and for patients to communicate and support each other. From the perspective of a participant, social media could provide a convenient way to participate in a group, as the participant chooses where and when to log in to the group.

Main Questions

- Can a private Twitter group be used to deliver weight loss counseling?
- Who could benefit from Twitter-based weight loss counseling?
- Is it feasible to deliver counseling entirely via Twitter?

Study

This study is a series of three pilot programs designed to help people lose weight. All interventions were delivered by a clinical psychologist and exercise physiologist using a shortened version of the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) Lifestyle Intervention. In each Twitter intervention, counselors posted twice a day to start conversations using pictures, and links to share online articles, pictures, YouTube exercise videos, and recipes. Counselors also encouraged participant interactions through thoughtful and engaging questions and polls. Each subsequent pilot program incorporated lessons learned from the previous pilot group.

Pilot 1: Adults with obesity and depression participated in 12 weekly group counseling sessions AND a private Twitter group. Participants did not have to be social media users to participate.

Pilot 2: Adults with obesity who were not depressed participated in 12 weekly visits AND a Twitter group. All participants had experience with social media.

Pilot 3: Adults with obesity who were not depressed participated in a 12-week Twitter group with only 1 group visit. All participants had experience with social media.

The Bottom Line

Using a private Twitter group to deliver a behavioral weight-loss intervention is feasible and acceptable among adults who were not depressed and who had experience with social media. Participants reported feeling more weight loss support from the Twitter group than from their family and friends.

Contact

Sherry L Pagoto, PhD, Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, Department of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, 55 Lake Avenue North, Worcester, MA, 01655
Sherry.Pagoto@umassmed.edu



Spotlight on Results

- Participants in each group lost weight. Mean Weight Loss over 12 Weeks by group:
Group 1: 2.3 lbs
Group 2: 5.6 lbs
Group 3: 5.4 lbs
- Usefulness of Twitter Groups: 90% of participants in Group 2 and 100% of participants in Group 3 found the support of the Twitter group to be at least somewhat useful.
- Delivering the program entirely via Twitter was just as feasible as when it was accompanied by group visits.

Call for Action

Using Twitter may be a less expensive and more convenient way to deliver effective weight-loss counseling than traditional in-person groups that require transportation and availability for repeated, lengthy visits. Future research is needed to further define how to best deliver the intervention via social media.

Source

Pagoto SL, Waring ME, Schneider KL, Oleski JL, Olendzki E, Hayes RB, Appelhans BM, Whited MC, Busch AM, Lemon SC. Twitter-Delivered Behavioral Weight-Loss Interventions: A Pilot Series. *JMIR Res Protoc*. 2015 Oct 23;4(4):e123. doi: 10.2196/resprot.4864.