

A Survey of Dental Pain Experiences Reported on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

We investigated the content of Twitter posts meeting search criteria relating to dental pain. A set of 1000 tweets was randomly selected from 4859 tweets during one constructed week in the summer of 2010. The content was coded using pre-established, non mutually-exclusive categories, including the experience of dental pain, actions taken or contemplated in response to a toothache, impact on daily life, and advice sought from the Twitter community. After excluding ambiguous tweets, spam, and repeat users, we analyzed 772 tweets and calculated frequencies. Of the sample of 772 tweets, 83% (n = 640) were primarily categorized as a general statement of dental pain, 22% (n = 170) as an action taken or contemplated, and 15% (n = 112) as describing an impact on daily activities. Among the actions taken or contemplated, 44% (n= 74) reported seeing a dentist, 43% (n = 73) took an analgesic or antibiotic medication, and 14% (n= 24) actively sought advice from the Twitter community. Twitter users extensively share health information relating to dental pain, including actions taken to relieve pain and the impact of pain. Many of the findings in our study mirrored previous findings from epidemiological studies on dental pain utilizing classical approaches. This new medium may provide an opportunity for dental professionals to monitor health status and disseminate timely evidence-based health information.