

Study finds WeChat program helps recovery of heart disease patients

October 11 2019



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Patients recovering from life-threatening coronary heart disease who received rehabilitation through WeChat experienced a better recovery than those having standard care, new Curtin University-led research has found.

The research, published in *The Lancet Digital Health*, recruited 312

patients with coronary heart [disease](#) from a hospital in Shanghai, China, and measured the effectiveness of a smartphone-based rehabilitation and prevention program, which offered information about cardiovascular health and disease, [physical activity](#) and nutritional advice, support for adherence to cardioprotective medications and medical counselling via the popular Chinese social media platform WeChat.

Co-author Associate Professor Andrew Maiorana, from the School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science at Curtin University, said coronary heart disease was rapidly increasing in developing countries, but access to effective cardiac rehabilitation programs remained low.

"In China, coronary heart disease is now the main cause of premature death and morbidity, so it is essential that [prevention programs](#) are accessible, affordable and scalable to patients who have already experienced life-threatening medical conditions, such as coronary heart disease," Associate Professor Maiorana said.

"Our study recruited 312 patients with coronary heart disease who had received percutaneous coronary interventions, a procedure used to open blocked coronary arteries, from a hospital in Shanghai, China.

"We found that patients who followed a comprehensive rehabilitation and secondary prevention program delivered via WeChat experienced a better recovery following their discharge from hospital compared to those patients who had received standard care. The benefits included decreased [blood pressure](#) and resting [heart rate](#), greater knowledge and awareness of coronary heart disease and higher fitness levels, approximately six months after their discharge."

The research also found that patients were more compliant with taking preventative medication and had improved lipid profile, a blood test used to measure the risk of cardiovascular disease, approximately 12

months after hospital discharge.

Lead author Ph.D. candidate Tashi Dorje, also from Curtin's School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, said the research showed that the use of [social media platforms](#) such as WeChat for patients recovering from medical conditions was extremely effective.

"We observed significant improvements in the awareness and knowledge of [coronary heart disease](#) in patients with access to cardiac rehabilitation programs, highlighting the effectiveness of social media-based health education," Dr. Dorje said.

"Our study highlights the potential of social media-based service models as an effective, accessible and affordable alternative to hospital-based programs for cardiac patients. Further research is required to determine whether other social media platforms such as Facebook offer similar benefits."

The research paper is titled "Smartphone and social media-based cardiac rehabilitation and secondary prevention in China (SMART-CR/SP): a parallel-group, single-blind, randomised controlled trial."

More information: Tashi Dorje et al. Smartphone and social media-based cardiac rehabilitation and secondary prevention in China (SMART-CR/SP): a parallel-group, single-blind, randomised controlled trial, *The Lancet Digital Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/S2589-7500\(19\)30151-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(19)30151-7)

Provided by Curtin University

Citation: Study finds WeChat program helps recovery of heart disease patients (2019, October 11) retrieved 7 February 2023 from

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