

**Will Trauma Patients Use an Online Community to Help Cope with Traumatic Injury?***Paul E. Matuszewski, MD; Ian Weston; Michael Bosse, MD; Andrew N. Pollak, MD;**The Major Extremity Trauma Research Consortium<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>METRC Consortium (multiple study sites), Maryland, USA*

**Purpose:** 60% of patients undergoing elective procedures use the Internet for information. We previously demonstrated that providing trauma patients with a custom website results in low utilization. This may be related to the content provided. Trauma patients may prefer to use the web to connect with others or learn coping skills. The purpose of this study is to characterize the usage patterns of a website designed as a community and to determine effectiveness of referral via a multicentered trial that incorporated the website into its intervention.

**Methods:** Our website was built in 2008 to act as a community for patients and families. The website serves as a portal to peer visitation, support groups, online forums and information on injury / recovery. Registration is free and anonymous. 49 active centers currently participate, increasing from 2008. In 2013, 6 Level I trauma centers began enrolling patients in a prospective trial to evaluate a psychosocial intervention including the web site. Traffic logs were analyzed from 2008-2015, recording trends in page views, sessions, users, and geography. Usage, defined as number of sessions (visits) and users, was compared to the number of participant centers and enrollment volume.

**Results:** Average views per month in 2008 were 533 and 3518 in 2015. The most frequently accessed areas were about survivor stories/peer support groups (27%), injury (24%), forums (9%), and trauma centers (6%). 20% of users were return visitors, accessing survivor stories/peer support (22%), forums (12%), trauma centers (12%), and injury (10%). The number of trauma centers correlated strongly with users, sessions, and page views ( $R^2 = .75, .75, \text{ and } .65, P < 0.0001$ ). A weak correlation was found between number of trial enrollees and monthly users and sessions, but was not significant ( $R^2 = .28 \text{ and } .30$  respectively,  $P > 0.05$ ). Enrollment by center strongly correlated with usage from the respective site's geographical area ( $R^2 = .67, P = 0.02$ ).

**Conclusion:** Use of our web community has increased 7 times. The use of the website and geographic distribution were both found to strongly correlate with sites emphasizing the program as part of a multicentered trial. This suggests that demand exists for an online community providing both support and information, and that referral to this service can effectively bolster participation. Future research should focus on identifying strategies for encouraging use of survivor-centric online communities and evaluating effectiveness to improve trauma outcomes.