

Poster Session III
Poster # 6

Disparities in the Awareness of Heart Attack Symptoms among College Students

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to assess the awareness of heart attack symptoms and the knowledge of how to respond to a heart attack among college students.

Background: The ability to recognize heart attack symptoms is important for laypeople in order to seek treatment quickly and decrease mortality; however, little is known regarding college students' awareness of signs and symptoms of heart attack.

Methods: This study was a cross-sectional, descriptive study using an online survey at a local university in the USA. All undergraduate students at the university were invited to participate in the study via university webmail between April and May 2010. Students were asked to respond to questions regarding: a) heart attack symptoms (e.g., pain/discomfort in the jaw, neck, back; feeling weak/lightheaded, or faint; chest pain/discomfort; pain/discomfort in the arms or shoulder; shortness of breath); b) false symptoms (i.e., trouble seeing in one or both eyes); and c) what the first action should be if someone was having a heart attack. A 12.5% response rate was obtained; 92.1% of the responses (n = 785) were included in the data analysis.

Results: Most students recognized chest pain as a heart attack symptom and answered that one should immediately call 9-1-1 if someone was having a heart attack (97.7% and 95.9%, respectively). Less than half of the students knew all the heart attack symptoms. However, 19.1% of the students knew all the correct and incorrect symptoms and answered that one should call 9-1-1 if someone was having a heart attack. Women, older students, Caucasians, nursing and health sciences students, and those with previous knowledge about heart attack symptoms were more likely to recognize all heart attack symptoms than their counterparts. Age, race/ethnicity, major, and previous education were significant predictors of college students' knowledge about both heart attack symptoms and what action they should take if someone was having a heart attack. Indirect experience of a heart attack from family members/friends did not show a significant difference in awareness of heart attack symptoms.

Conclusions and Implications: More public education/campaigns are needed to decrease the disparities found in this study by age, gender, race/ethnicity, major and the previous education of heart attack symptoms among college students. Younger student cohorts should be included in education programs of the heart attack symptoms.