

# Twitter opens a door to Iowa operating room

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Monna Cleary, of Lost Nation, Iowa, talks with Dr. Jerry Rozeboom at St. Luke's Hospital, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Cleary agreed to let hospital staff post a play-by-play of her Monday surgery on Twitter, passing along real-time information from the operating room to her children in the waiting room and anyone else who wanted to read in. (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)

(AP) -- From anesthesia to the recovery room, 70-year-old Monna Cleary's children followed her surgery - 140 characters or less at a time.

Twitter is opening doors to the sterile confines of operating rooms, paving the way for families - and anyone else for that matter - to follow a patient's progress as they go under the knife.

Most of the Cleary family chose to track the developments from a laptop computer in the hospital's waiting room. But one daughter-in-law kept tabs from work.

"It's real time information instead of sitting and not knowing in the waiting room," said Cleary's son Joe, hours after his mother's [surgery](#) Monday at St. Luke's [Hospital](#) in Cedar Rapids.

"It made the time go by," said Cleary, who was joined by a brother, two sisters and a sister-in-law at the hospital. "We all feel it was a positive experience."

His mother, who underwent a hysterectomy and uterine prolapse surgery, had given her OK for hospital spokeswoman Sarah Corizzo to post a play-by-play of the operation on [Twitter](#), a social-networking site that lets users send out snippets of information up to 140 characters long using cell phones or computers.

Corizzo sent more than 300 tweets over more than three hours from a computer just outside the operating room's sterile field. Nearly 700 people followed them. Eight tweeted questions to Corizzo about the procedure and a Cleary family member commented on how fascinating it was to follow the surgery.

The primary goal of the Twitter posts was education, Corizzo said, but it had the added benefit of keeping the family informed during surgery. It also helps to raise the profile of the hospital.

The idea to follow the surgery on Twitter at St. Luke's evolved after a similar surgery was Webcast several months ago.

"A lot of people would like to go into the [operating room](#) and see what happens but don't want all the visuals and stuff," said Laura Rainey, another hospital spokeswoman. "This is a more gentle way to help inform patients and consumers."

The Iowa hospital isn't the first to describe a surgery on Twitter. Others

include Children's Medical Center in Dallas, which tweeted in May when a father donated a kidney to his son, and Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, where officials have tweeted about several surgeries since January.

Dian Luffman, a spokeswoman with Change:healthcare, a business that helps clients save money on procedures, said hospitals using Twitter during surgery is a sign that it's entering the mainstream, especially among the 20-and-30 somethings.

"I think hospitals are trying to build relationships," she said.

Amanda Gillbret, whose husband and son were involved in the Dallas kidney transplant, said she appreciated being able to monitor her husband's surgery at another hospital while she was at Children's Medical Center with her son.

"I felt like I was part of my husband's surgery and connected to what he was going through but was there with my son, too," Gillbret said. "It gave me a huge peace and it was just comforting knowing what was happening."

She noted that typically a person can sit for hours in a waiting room and maybe get two phone calls from the operating room.

"I received updates every two to three minutes," Gillbret said. "It not only helped the family stay in the loop but friends who weren't able to be there."

While the Detroit hospital has tweeted during several surgeries, neither the Cedar Rapids hospital nor the one in Dallas have immediate plans to do it again.

Officials at both hospitals said they would be open to the possibility if

both the surgeon and patient are willing.

Cleary said she agreed to have her procedure posted on Twitter - but only after being educated to what tweeting was.

"I'm not much of a computer bug so I didn't know that much about it," Cleary said. "I didn't know they did that sort of thing."

During her surgery, Corizzo relayed tweets ever few minutes.

"Putting numbing medication where the incisions will be. Making first incision right now," Corizzo tweeted at the beginning of the procedure.

Later, Corizzo sent a message that read: "Right now doctor is cutting across some vessels & ligaments that connect the ovaries to the uterus."

Then: "Opening up the peritoneum right now," which led to a tweet questioning what the peritoneum is. Corizzo explained it is the sac that lines the abdomen.

The surgeon, Dr. Jerry Rozeboom, said he asked Cleary to participate because she is "very open, conversant and willing to be part of the education process.

"It was mostly a patient who I thought was open to helping other people learn about new technology and maybe helping other women in her situation," Rozeboom said.

Before the surgery, Rozeboom said no restrictions would be placed on what could be included, but he made it clear that if it became a distraction or a complication arose, the tweeting would stop.

In her [tweets](#), Corizzo detailed the robotic equipment used for the

surgery and included photos that showed Rozeboom at the control panel of the equipment and an internal image showing stitches being put in place.

She also tweeted about the causes and symptoms of the condition that led to Cleary's surgery.

Once the procedure was done, Corizzo sent a final tweet to Cleary's family.

"She's doing great. She'll see you soon."

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