Curriculum Development using VR technology to enhance empathetic communication skills in future health care professionals

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What is empathy?

"The capacity to put one's self in another's shoes and feel what that person is going through and share their emotions and feelings" can be defined as Empathy. More specifically, as far as the Healthcare section is concerned can be determined as "the recognition and validation of a patient's fear, anxiety, pain, and worry". Moreover, it is the ability to understand patients' feelings and facilitate a more accurate diagnoses and more caring treatment. Expressing patient empathy not only advances humanism in healthcare but it is also the key ingredient to enhancing the patient experience and patient encounter. Both empathy and compassion in healthcare play vital roles in the patient experience and are key components of the health care provider-patient relationship. When a patient arrives to see their healthcare provider, the patient's medical condition — whether it is a severe illness or injury, a chronic condition, or simply a routine check-up – will often manifest emotions that influence the way the patient experiences his/her illness and the treatment. So, it is extremely important for the patient to feel that he/she is receiving the very best care, and that is conveyed when his/her care team is empathetic and compassionate.

Welcome to the Empathy in Health Care

Empathy in Health Care aims to develop curriculum and materials on empathetic skills, certified with ISO, that will be based on current research evidence and patient participation through their own personal experiences, ideas and expectations (for VET and Higher Education).

EMPATHY IN HEALTH develops high acuity scenarios in the areas of empathetic communication which (a) provides a consistent clinical communication experience, (b) enhances student confidence in developing new skills by allowing them to practice in a safe environment and (c) provides students the opportunity to develop empathetic skills and competences. Based on the above scenarios, the project will develop virtual reality videos (sector specific), educational videos (sector specific) and role plays (sector specific) all aiming to develop the empathetic competence. Finally, the project aims to support tutors and trainers to integrate Virtual Reality in their teaching/training through the development of their skills as far as virtual reality is concerned. The project provides the tools and techniques for this integration to the higher education and VET providers in the consortium, thus supporting tutors in delivering the

training. At the same time, the results of the project will be available to other higher education institutions and other vet providers.

Project Objectives

The main objectives of the project are:

1. Develop an empathetic skills curriculum and materials, certified with ISO that will be based on current research evidence and patient participation through their own personal experiences, ideas and expectations (for Vocational Training and Higher Education),
2. Use this curriculum to develop high acuity virtual scenarios in the areas of empathetic communication which will (a) provide a consistent clinical communication experience, (b) enhance student confidence in developing new skills by allowing them to practice in a safe environment and (c) provide student feedback on areas of strength and further improvement
3. Develop VR videos and educational videos (Sector specific) to develop the empathetic competence,
4. Support tutors and trainers to integrate VR in their teaching /training through the development of their skills as far as virtual reality is concerned.

Deliverables at a glance

The following are the main deliverables of the project

o IO1: Qualification Framework: Empathetic Communication in Health Care Profession
o IO2: Certification Scheme for the Certification of Curricula and Materials
o IO3: Curriculum: Empathetic Communication in Health Care Profession
o IO4: A list of scenarios
o IO5: Interactive Virtual Reality Videos for Health Care Profession (using avatars)
o IO6: Educational Videos in Health Care Profession
o IO7: Tutor Guides (2) for Health Care Professionals (HE and VET)
o IO8: Virtual Reality Authoring Tool

Project progress until now

Following the preparation of the draft VR scenarios, the first training activity took place in Athens in mid of April. Overall the 4 partners; EHB, UTH, UNIC and MMC practiced with the VRs in order to provide feedback for the final version. Furthermore, the 10th meeting was held at 8th of April in Athens. The Curriculum was piloting by the partners (the three educational sections and supplementary material), more than 50 students had participated up to the end of the July whereas the assessments and comments were more than satisfying. Additionally, the Curriculum was presented to National trainers by most of the partners with exceptional feedback. As the VR Authoring Tool was developed, the second training activity took place in Athens at the end of July. The partners learned how they could produce more VR scenarios and the final versions of VRs were settled. Furthermore, the 11th meeting was held at 19th of July in Athens. The Multiplier Events by most of the partners have been held, presenting the results of the project to academics from higher education (health sciences), health care providers, and representatives from Ministries, National Key Stakeholders, students and patients associations.

Fig. 1. Virtual Reality Training of the Master Tutors in Athens

Next Steps

The partners are currently working on completing the whole project and focus mainly on its dissemination.

Introducing the team

Mediterranean Management Centre (Cyprus) is a provider of CPD training and C-VET certification for workers and employability initiatives for disadvantaged groups. MMC has a vast experience in coordination of projects as it has already coordinated very big projects such as ERASMUS, EQUAL, Leonardo DOI, Leonardo TOI and Key activity.

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of Nicosia (Cyprus) is a private university that through its five Schools offers more than 100 Bachelor, Master and doctoral degrees in the areas of business, science, medicine, education and the liberal arts.

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C.C.C.-Cyprus Certification Company (Cyprus) is a Government-owned Certification Organization founded in 2001 and operating as a private company with the Government being its only shareholder.

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Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) founded in 1970, provides education for over 16,000 students in 8 faculties and has been participating in the Erasmus program since the start of the program in 1988.

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Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin (Germany) represents a single medical faculty, which serves both Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin. Charité extends over four campuses, and has over 100 different Departments and Institutes, which make up a total of 17 different CharitéCenters.

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University of Thessaly (Greece) with 37 Departments, and 8 schools is a University with its own identity and with a prominent position in our national educational system. University of Thessaly provides undergraduate and postgraduate programs and extra-curricular modules in specific research and business fields, for over 43000 students

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Omega-Theofanis Alexandridis & SIA EE (Greece) is an IT provider company that serves Greek public bodies, private sector and other non-profit organizations with technology and services. The company applies gamification and game mechanics in different domains and also provides expertise in Systems Integration and Communications as well as practical expertise in the fields of Validation and Trials.

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