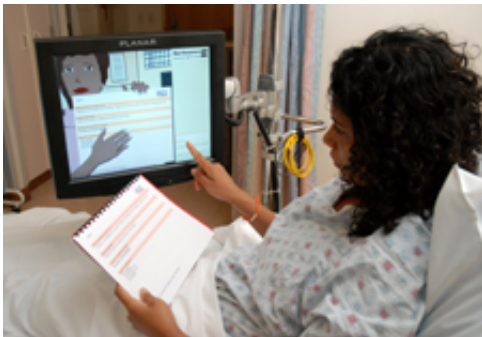


Virtual nurse helps counsel patients before their hospital release

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Patient interacts with virtual nurse. Photo by Glenn Kulbako.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Looking for a nurse with a calm, patient bedside manner?

A Northeastern researcher has created an empathetic virtual nurse to help [patients](#) about to be discharged from a hospital stay understand and follow their care instructions.

According to Timothy Bickmore, assistant professor of computer and information science, and the developer of the virtual nurse, “Post-discharge self-care regimens are typically complex, with the average patient going away with 10 medications and multiple follow-up appointments. The discharge is even more hazardous for patients who have difficulty reading and following basic written medical instructions.”

On average, a pre-discharge conversation that outlines care instructions lasts fewer than eight minutes. Yet it's a significant transition in medical care, intended to transform patients from passive recipients to active participants in their recovery.

The virtual nurse Bickmore has developed is designed to give pre-discharge patients more information. The animation can be brought to a patient's bedside via a computer on a wheeled kiosk. The patient is able to control the interaction with a touch-screen display. Typically, patients spend about 30 minutes with the virtual nurse, reviewing an "After-Hospital Care Plan" booklet they have been given.

A three-year clinical trial of the virtual nurse began at Boston Medical Center in fall 2008. The trial will ultimately enroll 750 patients; 220 have participated so far.

Results to date indicate that low health literacy patients find the system easy to use, and even preferable to receiving the information from a live doctor or nurse.

Patients also express appreciation for the time and attention the virtual nurse gives them, and see her as an additional authoritative source for their [medical information](#), says Bickmore.

The research is the result of a collaboration between Bickmore and the Boston Medical Center, and is sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Provided by Northeastern University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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