

Virtual reality useful in addressing social determinants of health

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Virtual Reality (VR) is not just fun and games any more. Beyond entertainment, applications extend to military training, business and education.

In medicine, VR technology allows educators a way to ease barriers that may exist in terms of physical locations, scheduling and creating realistic scenarios for students to practice their clinical skills.

Now a new Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) study published in the journal *Academic Medicine*, demonstrates the feasibility of using VR technology to focus on strategies for addressing social determinants of health (SDOH) using an interprofessional approach.

"The American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) has acknowledged the importance of training future physicians to identify and address SDOH, however medical students and physician assistants often lack this training. Social workers, meanwhile, have extensive SDOH training, however, few [medical professionals](#) have opportunities to engage in inter-professional training with [social workers](#)," explained corresponding author Pablo Buitron de la Vega, MD, MSc, assistant professor of medicine at BUSM.

To test the educational impact of this emerging learning technology, medical, physician assistant and social work students were placed in VR simulated learning environments (SLEs) to learn how to address SDOH collaboratively. MD and PA students learned patient engagement strategies from SW students, while the SW students enhanced their healthcare leadership capacity. All three sets of students found this means of instruction acceptable, valuing the hands-on [virtual reality](#) inter-professional training and expressing interest in learning more about the scope of one another's role and community resources available to patients.

According to Buitron de la Vega this study not only aimed to improve [medical students'](#) ability to screen for SDOH, but also to help foster inter-professional collaboration between disciplines and an increased understanding of the various roles vital to a complete healthcare team.

"Increased adoption of VR during the COVID-19 pandemic has decreased the cost associated with this type of technology and has made this a more realistic learning model for health professional schools to adopt in the future," adds Buitron de la Vega.

More information: Pablo Buitron de la Vega et al, Virtual Reality Simulated Learning Environments: A Strategy To Teach Interprofessional Students About Social Determinants Of Health, *Academic Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1097/ACM.00000000000004776](https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.00000000000004776)

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