

# How virtual reality gaming can promote men's health

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Dr Mohamad Saab, Senior Lecturer and Director of Graduate Studies at the School of Nursing and Midwifery UCC, who led this research. Credit: University College Cork

A first-of-its kind study has found that virtual reality gaming may be effective in promoting men's awareness of testicular diseases and increasing testicular self-examination.

The University College Cork (UCC) study was conducted in partnership

with nine Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs. This is the first time virtual reality gaming has been used to promote men's [health](#).

Dr. Mohamad Saab, senior lecturer and director of graduate studies at the School of Nursing and Midwifery UCC, will present the findings of his study at a Men's Health Symposium which will take place at UCC on Friday, 24 November.

Testicular cancer is one of the most common cancers among young men aged 15 to 44, yet many are unfamiliar with the disease and how easily they can play a role in detecting it. A [critical point](#) for [early diagnosis](#) is awareness of the disease and the willingness to perform a testicular self-examination.

In most cases, successful early detection of testicular diseases means that a patient faces less intensive therapy with less interruption to their quality of life while also being more cost-effective.

## **Many men ignore testicular symptoms**

Through his research, Saab found that men tend to ignore testicular symptoms like pain, lumps, and bumps until these symptoms become unbearable. This is mainly due to embarrassment and the fear of a potential cancer diagnosis.

Saab said, "We found that men are quite interested in learning more about testicular diseases. They preferred educational strategies that are brief, visually stimulating, innovative, positively worded and delivered frequently using light and simple language."

The Enhancing Men's Awareness of Testicular Diseases (E-MAT) study invited participants to play a three-level interactive VR game that takes place in a virtual apartment. The game invites participants to identify

changes like pain, swelling and lumps in testicles; learn about the links of symptoms to testicular diseases like testicular torsion and cancer; and learn about the techniques to perform testicular self-exam.

Saab said, "Our research found that men rarely checked their testicles and did not know what to look for while doing so. One man said that checking his testicles felt like trying to find 'a lump in a bag of lumps.'"

"Most people are aware of testicular diseases, particularly [testicular cancer](#). However, being aware of a disease and knowing the [disease](#) are two very different things. We found that men are quite interested in learning more about testicular diseases," Saab said.

## **Helping GAA players learn about testicular health**

The study found that VR has the potential to engage hard-to-reach age groups with a high retention rate of 90% of participants reported. The study found that 95% of participants reported an increase in their knowledge of testicular diseases and an improvement in their behavior in terms of performing testicular self-examination.

Men who play field games like hurling are at higher risk for testicular trauma and diseases. Saab said, "When struck the sliotar can reach a speed of 160km/h which poses significant injury risks. For this reason, we sought and secured initial funding from the Health Research Board to test the game in GAA clubs with a particular focus on 'Healthy Clubs.'"

Saab intends to apply for further funding to deliver and test the campaign nationally and ultimately make E-MAT publicity and freely available to encourage as many men as possible to take positive action about their health.

## Encouraging men to take action

At the men's health symposium, Saab will also share the insights into the "On the Ball" campaign, an inclusive community-based campaign to promote men's awareness of the most common testicular symptoms and the importance of testicular self-exams and of seeking [medical help](#) for symptoms of concern.

Professor Helen Whelton, Head of the College of Medicine and Health UCC, congratulated Dr. Mohamad Saab on delivering "innovative, excellent research using virtual reality gaming to promote [men's health](#), encouraging men to take positive action when it comes to their health."

"These studies on virtual reality gaming offer a compelling glimpse into the potential of using virtual reality to enhance men's awareness and autonomy in managing their health. This marks the first instance of employing VR in such a manner, and the symposium serves as a platform to present and underscore the significance of empowering men to take charge of their well-being. It emphasizes the importance of testicular self-examination and the early initiation of seeking help," Whelton said.

Provided by University College Cork

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