

Medical students open to learning with video games

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Today's students were raised with a digital mouse in their hands. So it should be no surprise that a majority of medical school students surveyed say video games and virtual reality environments could help them become better doctors.

A reported 98 percent of [medical students](#) surveyed at the University of Michigan and University of Wisconsin-Madison liked the idea of using technology to enhance their medical education, according to a study published online in *BMC Medical Education*.

For example, a [virtual environment](#) could help medical students learn how to interview a patient or run a patient clinic. In the survey, 80 percent of students said computer games can have an educational value.

The study helps dispel the stereotype of video games as the exclusive purview of adolescent loners. Instead they may be used as advanced teaching tools that fit an emerging learning style, authors say.

"Due in large part to their high degree of technological literacy, today's medical students are a radically different audience than the students of 15 to 20 years ago," former medical educator and president of Medical Cyberworlds, Inc. Frederick W. Kron, M.D., says of the so-called millennial generation. "They are actually more comfortable in image-rich environments than with text."

Male students were 4.4 times more likely than female students to play video games. These and other gender differences must be addressed as schools consider how to craft video games for use in medical education, authors say.

Among the more than 200 medical students surveyed, 77 percent said they would participate in a multi-player online health care simulator provided it helped them to accomplish an important goal.

"Role-playing games may have special educational use to help students envision what their life would be like in different types of professional practice," says Michael D. Fetters, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor in family medicine and director of the Japanese Family Health Program at U-M.

"Allowing students to step into the shoes of practitioners in different specialties, health care settings and economic systems, in an immersive and authentic way, could help guide their decisions regarding which career choices would be the best fit with their values and personal characteristics," Fetters says.

Hands-on simulators and computerized mannequins have become a fixture in medical education and help doctors learn how to make surgical incisions or deliver a baby, but medical schools continue to look for ways to train medical students for what they'll see in real life.

"Academic leadership has called for innovative methods to enhance how medical students access the concepts that they need to become doctors," says Kron, former assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Wisconsin. "New media technologies developed by the [video game](#) industry hold great promise to helping educators to meet that critical mandate."

More information: "Medical Student attitudes toward video games and related new media technologies in medical education." *BMC Medical Education* 2010, 10:50 [doi: 10.1186/1472-6920-10-50](#)

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