

VR tool helps students learn to handle violent patients

It gives nursing and medicine students at NUS safe space to make mistakes

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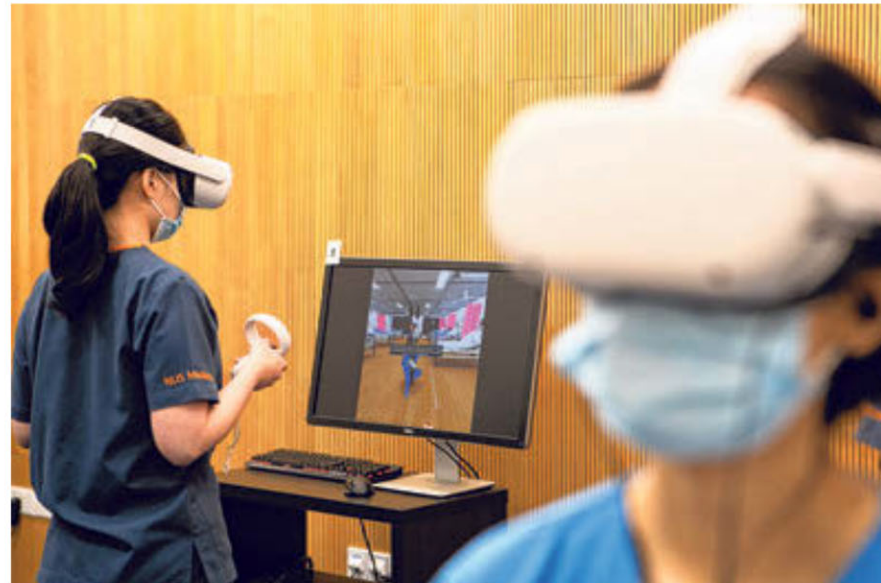
The National University of Singapore's (NUS) curriculum for medicine and nursing students will include a virtual reality (VR) training programme that teaches them how to deal with a violent patient.

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened some people's mental health, and more instances of violence towards healthcare workers have been reported, said Assistant Professor Cyrus Ho from the department of psychological medicine.

To address the issue, the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine has developed the Virtual Reality in Agitation Management (VRAM) programme for medical and nursing students.

In a media interview at NUS, Prof Ho and Assistant Professor Shawn Goh from NUS Nursing said they have seen healthcare workers being verbally abused and kicked and spat at by patients.

Drawing on their clinical experience, they developed VRAM to play out a scenario where a patient experiencing drug-induced psychosis starts to act erratically, attempts to harm healthcare workers and holds a child hostage.



Students wear a VR headset and use controllers to navigate through the simulation, in which a patient begins to act erratically. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

The simulation also includes several distractions, such as noises from a television, requests from nurses and complaints from irritated family members.

Students wear a VR headset and use controllers to navigate through the simulation. They are given options to deal with the situation, such as choosing the right words to say, giving the patients the right dose of medication and whether to physically restrain the patient.

If the student picks all the right options, the virtual patient will calm down and retreat to her bed.

In the worst-case scenario, the patient will make a break for it and run out of the ward.

Said Prof Goh: "The VR setting makes it a safe environment for students' learning as the wrong re-

Second-year nursing student Isaac Soh, 22, said: "The simulation is tactile in the sense that you feel a shake when the patient throws objects at you. In a situation like this, one might freeze up, so the simulation helps me think on the spot."

Another second-year nursing student, Miss Chloe Chia, 20, said to

avoid getting hurt, students are not allowed to handle agitated patients during their hospital postings. So VRAM provides a safe space for them to make mistakes.

"The programme allows me to be exposed to things that I cannot be exposed to while still in school. I made a lot of wrong choices on purpose to see what will happen and to learn from them," she added.

Prof Ho said: "Moving forward, we will see more distressed patients, and healthcare workers need to have an empathetic response while collaboratively making decisions under pressure.

"With the blended learning approach, we hope to provide more holistic learning."

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