Curriculum Development using VR technology to enhance empathetic communication skills in future health care professionals

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What is empathy?

"The capacity to put one's self in another's shoes and feel what that person is going through and share their emotions and feelings can be defined as Empathy. More specifically, as far as the Healthcare section is concerned, Empathy can be determined as "the recognition and validation of a patient's fear, anxiety, pain, and worry". Moreover, it is the ability to understand patients' feelings and facilitate a more accurate diagnosis and better treatment. Expressing patient empathy not only advances humanism in healthcare but also is the key ingredient to enhancing the quality of health care, patient experience and patient encounter. Both empathy and compassion in healthcare play vital roles in the patient experience and are key components of the relationship between healthcare professionals and patients. When a patient or a pregnant woman arrives to see their healthcare provider, the patient's medical condition — whether it is a severe illness or injury, a chronic condition, or simply a routine check-up – will often manifest emotions such as anxiety, fear, and apprehension. So, it is extremely important for the patient to feel that he/she is receiving the very best care, and that is conveyed when his/her care team is empathetic and compassionate.

Welcome to the Empathy in Health Care

Empathy in Health Care aims to develop a curriculum and associated materials on empathetic skills, certified with ISO, that will be based on current research evidence and patient participation through their own personal experiences, ideas and expectations (for VET and Higher Education).

EMPATHY IN HEALTH develops high acuity scenarios in the areas of empathetic communication which (a) provides a consistent clinical communication experience, (b) enhances student confidence in developing new skills by allowing them to practice in a safe environment and (c) provides students the opportunity to develop empathetic skills and competences. Based on the above scenarios the project will develop virtual reality videos, (sector specific) educational videos (sector specific) and role plays (sector specific) all aiming to develop the empathetic competence. Finally, the project aims to support tutors and trainers to integrate Virtual Reality in their teaching /training through the development of their skills as far as virtual reality is concerned. The project provides the tools and techniques for this integration to the higher education and VET providers in the consortium thus supporting tutors in delivering the

training. At the same time the results of the project will be available to other higher education institutions and other vet providers.

Project Objectives

The main objectives of the project are:

1. Develop an empathetic skills curriculum and materials, certified with ISO that will be based on current research evidence and patient participation through their own personal experiences, ideas and expectations (for Vocational Training and Higher Education),
2. Use this curriculum to develop high acuity virtual scenarios in the areas of empathetic communication which will (a) provide a consistent clinical communication experience, (b) enhance student confidence in developing new skills by allowing them to practice in a safe environment and (c) provide student feedback on areas of strength and further improvement
3. Develop VR videos and educational videos (Sector specific) to develop the empathetic competence,
4. Support tutors and trainers to integrate VR in their teaching /training through the development of their skills as far as virtual reality is concerned.

Deliverables at a glance

The following are the main deliverables of the project

- o IO1: Qualification Framework: Empathetic Communication in Health Care Profession
- o IO2: Certification Scheme for the Certification of Curricula and Materials
- o IO3: Curriculum: Empathetic Communication in Health Care Profession
- o IO4: A list of scenaria
- o IO5: Interactive Virtual Reality Videos for Health Care Profession (using avatars)
- o IO6: Educational Videos in Health Care Profession
- o IO7: Tutor Guides (2) for Health Care Professionals (HE and VET)
- o IO8: Virtual Reality Authoring Tool

Project progress until now

Following the completion of an in-depth literature review on empathy in general as well as on empathy in the health care sector and the development of a Focus Group Guide, the partners conducted Focus Groups in Cyprus, Greece, Germany and Belgium. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Focus Groups were implemented online. The aim of the Focus Groups was to investigate and describe the needs, barriers and facilitators for achieving an effective empathetic consultation and interaction between the health care professionals and the patients. Based on the analysis of the results of the Focus Groups, the Consortium developed the learning outcomes to be included in two Qualification Frameworks (one for vocational education and one for higher education). Moreover, following the completion of the Focus Groups, the Consortium carried out a workshop in which they identified different scenarios that will be developed into VR, educational videos and role-playing scenarios to be used under the IO4. The partners also participated in a training conducted by Omega-Theofanis Alexandridis & SIA EE on the development of VR scenarios.

In summary, three online meetings, one workshop and one training took place during the period of June-November, 2020.

Figure 1 Online Zoom Worskhop, 7 October 2020.
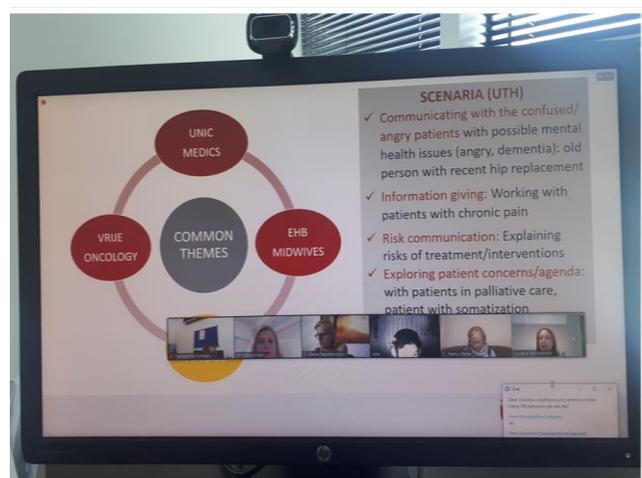
Next Steps

The partners are currently working on the development of 12 scenarios. Overall, 4 scenarios will be developed for VR (3 for Higher Education and 1 for VET) and 8 other scenarios will be developed into educational videos and scenarios for role playing. In addition, the partners are finalising the composition of the Qualification Framework.

Introducing the team

Mediterranean Management Centre (Cyprus) is a provider of CPD training and C-VET certification for workers and employability initiatives for disadvantaged groups. MMC has a vast experience in coordination of projects as it has already coordinated very big projects such as ERASMUS, EQUAL, Leonardo DOI, Leonardo TOI and Key activity.

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UNIC-University of Nicosia (Cyprus) is a private university that through its five Schools offers more than 100 Bachelor, Master and doctoral degrees in the areas of business, science, medicine, education and the liberal arts.

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C.C.C.-Cyprus Certification Company (Cyprus) is a Government-owned Certification Organization founded in 2001 and operating as a private company with the Government being its only shareholder.

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Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) founded in 1970, provides education for over 16,000 students in 8 faculties and has been participating in the Erasmus program since the start of the program in 1988.

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Evangelische Hochschule Berlin (EHB) (Germany) The Protestant University of Applied Science in Berlin, is a teaching and research institution with a long tradition in the education of social and health professionals. The University of Applied Science Berlin through its departments offers six Bachelor and three Master degrees in different areas including social work, nursing and midwifery with an overall student number of 1550.

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University of Thessaly (Greece) with 37 departments and 8 schools is a University with its own identity and with a prominent position in Greek higher educational system. University of Thessaly provides undergraduate and postgraduate programs and extra-curricular modules in specific research and business fields, for over 43000 students.

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Omega-Theofanis Alexandridis & SIA EE (Greece) is an IT provider company that serves Greek public bodies, private sector and other non-profit organizations with technology and services. The company applies gamification and game mechanics in different domains and also provides expertise in Systems Integration and Communications as well as practical expertise in the fields of Validation and Trials.

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