NATIONAL CENTER FOR TELEHEALTH & TECHNOLOGY
a DCoE Center

T2 Virtual PTSD Experience

Background

National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2) Virtual Worlds program is a three-dimensional, computer-based simulation environment in which users interact with objects, scripts and other users in a shared virtual space, to improve psychological health and traumatic brain injury services. The program includes the **T2 Virtual PTSD Experience**, which is designed to be an interactive, immersive tool to help visitors learn about the causes and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and how to access resources for care in a unique and engaging environment. These environments are accessed through personal computers "24/7," increasing convenience, minimizing perceived stigma and improving education, access to care and quality of care for service members, veterans and their families. Users can remain anonymous and access an endless range of immersive environments. The T2 Virtual PTSD Experience is now available for public access.

Why it is Needed

Research indicates that nearly 50 percent of service members who screen positive for psychological health concerns following deployment do not seek care or utilize services. The reasons vary but may include perceived stigma and barriers to accessing care.

Current websites educating service members about post-deployment psychological health concerns consist of content written by experts, video interviews of service members dealing with similar concerns, self-assessment screening tools, self-help exercises and information regarding accessing care. These resources, while beneficial, also limit the interactive experience provided to visitors.

The T2 Virtual Worlds Program combines the expertise of T2's psychology subject matter experts with virtual worlds developers and artists. The result is an environment that invites users to learn by doing, to augment information available on two-dimensional websites and to connect users in a more personal way to best practices and evidence-based care.

How it Works

The T2 Virtual PTSD Experience is presented as a self-guided exploration, thus eliminating the need for live staffing, while still allowing for real-time interaction by participating in learning simulations. The program provides an immersive, interactive learning experience designed to educate visitors about combat-related PTSD. It includes a simulation demonstrating how PTSD may be acquired during a combat-related traumatic event, including an explanation of the connections between danger cues and triggers, the role of avoidance in the development of PTSD and how it is a normal human response to traumatic events. Additionally, this environment includes simulations

of PTSD symptoms, helping the visitor learn through interactive activities how PTSD symptoms may show up in a person's life. Finally, the program includes information to help visitors determine whether they or a loved one is in need of care and how to access that care through the Defense Department or Department of Veterans Affairs.

Visitors can access information from the comfort of their home, or anywhere that they have broadband Internet access, thus reducing perceived stigma and/or physical access barriers of a brick-and-mortar clinic. By providing an immersive environment, the T2 Virtual PTSD Experience can serve as a significant complement to existing two-dimensional websites, improving learning through doing rather than merely reading or watching videos about post-deployment concerns.

Feedback was collected from several groups of stakeholders, including Veterans Affairs and Army behavioral health care providers, Air Force personnel involved in explosive ordnance disposal and soldiers in a Warrior Transition Unit. Feedback was generally very positive and included insightful recommendations for changes, many of which were incorporated into the environment.

The Future

Future T2 virtual worlds projects include the development of additional educational resources on psychological health topics, exploring provider training and consultation assets and exploring the feasibility of offering evidence-based psychological health treatments in a virtual world environment. T2 will continue to lead the exploration of virtual worlds technology and programs to improve psychological health care and outreach benefiting service members, veterans and their families.

Resources

- **Website describing the project** — Includes news releases, video tours and recent news

- **January 19, 2011 Defense Department press release** — Announcing the launch of T2's Virtual Worlds program to help those experiencing PTSD

"We created an environment that lets people learn by doing, rather than reading text and watching videos on two-dimensional websites," said Kevin Holloway, the T2 psychologist who led the virtual world program development. "They can learn something new each time they visit."

The National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2) is a component center of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE). It serves as the primary Defense Department office for cutting-edge approaches to the use of technology in the areas of psychological health and traumatic brain injury.