

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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Federal commitment to Pulse!! Program rises to \$14.7 Million Research promising for medical education using virtual-world technologies

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has received \$2.4 million in federal funds through the Office of Naval Research for continued development of Pulse!! The Virtual Clinical Learning Lab, which uses videogame-based technologies to deliver experiential medical education.

Pulse!! has been in development since 2005, and Congress has appropriated an additional \$2.4 million to the project for the 2009 fiscal year, bringing the total federal investment to almost \$14.7 million.

“We are gratified by the continued support of Pulse!!,” said Flavius Killebrew, president and CEO of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. “This institution is committed to cutting-edge research, especially when it touches the lives of men and women in our uniformed services.”

Early Pulse!! virtual cases were set in the intensive care unit of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., but the project’s studio on the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi campus is currently developing cases set in Iraq for training military medics in tactical combat casualty care.

U.S. Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, has been the Pulse!! project’s chief congressional advocate since its inception.

“Pulse!! is a major initiative in the field of military and civilian medical education and training,” Ortiz said. “I am proud to have stood by the project, because it not only benefits our military but the South Texas economy. It’s brought a new industry and new, high-paying jobs to South Texas.”

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Claudia L. McDonald, associate vice president for special projects at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and the project's principal investigator, said Pulse!! "will change the face of medical education.

"Our research so far indicates that our learning platform is a viable environment in which to embed medical instruction," McDonald said. "We are currently analyzing research indicating support for the use of the Pulse!! learning platform as an effective teaching strategy for delivering higher-education curricula within the health care professions."

Transfer of training and learning studies were conducted Sept. 2-5, at Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, Conn.; Sept. 22-25 at Christus Spohn Hospital Corpus Christi-Shoreline; and Sept. 29-Oct. 2, at Tufts University-Baystate Medical Center, Springfield, Mass. Studies also are planned at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore.

McDonald's research colleagues include: Jan Cannon-Bowers, associate professor and senior research associate for the Institute for Simulation and Training at the University of Central Florida (UCF); Clint Bowers, professor of psychology at UCF; Renee Stout, president of her own consulting firm in human-factors psychology; Dr. Kirk Shelley, professor of anesthesiology at Yale; Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, director of the Emergency Medicine Residency Program at Christus Spohn; and Dr. Neal Seymour, chief of general surgery at Tufts-Baystate.

McDonald said Pulse!! research is unique in the field of "serious games" devoted to education and training using virtual-reality technologies commonly used for entertainment.

"We don't know of any other project attempting to establish the validity and reliability of these high-fidelity, virtual-world technologies for medical learning," Dr. McDonald said. "Our project is designed to span all levels of medical practice, from first responders to resident physicians, and our studies are designed to indicate not only whether virtual-reality works as an educational strategy but whether it's cost-effective compared with other simulation methods."

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The Texas A&M University System has created the Center for Virtual Medical Education at A&M-Corpus Christi, which will be built around continued development of the Pulse!! learning platform in cooperation with the university's private-sector partner, BreakAway Ltd. of Hunt Valley, Md., a leading developer of entertainment games and game-based technology products. BreakAway holds an exclusive license for the underlying Pulse!! technology.

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