

## **Electronic Games: A Legitimate Diversional Therapy Intervention for Health Care Consumers?**

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### **The evils of game play and negative impact on society?**

- Much has been written about the negative effects of electronic games and game playing:
  - E.g., violence; social development, particularly of children; physical health...
- Critics argue that games divert consumer leisure time from more “healthy pursuits”.
- BUT
  - we argue that gaming, far from being an activity that should be criticised by social marketers, is an activity that can have clear therapeutic benefits to society, particularly in the field of diversional therapy.



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## What is diversional therapy?

- Similar to OT, but adopts a social model of care.
- Involves working with individuals of all ages to optimise their leisure/recreation involvement and experience in order to improve quality of life.
- Operates in a variety of health care settings with diverse health care consumers (e.g., the elderly, disabled, mental illness, palliative care patients).
- Interventions may include music, exercise, discussion groups, board games, art and craft, animal-assisted therapy, meditation.
  - But what about games?

## What electronic games may offer

- Diversional therapists aim to use leisure and recreational programs to support, challenge and enhance the psychological, social and physical well-being of individuals.
- Electronic games may help achieve these goals...



## What electronic games may offer

- 1. Psychological benefits
  - Key problems for patients (especially those hospitalised for extended periods): boredom, stress and depression, which can impede recovery.
  - Games offer the following:
    - an enjoyable form of entertainment (physiological arousal and affective experience)
    - ability to escape reality, relieve boredom, ease stress, have fun, experience dreams, realise fantasies
    - interactivity and vividness = focused attention. Sensory immersion and presence can result (i.e. removal from the patient's "real" environment)
    - distraction from painful procedures and treatments; help patients cope



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- 2. Social benefits
  - Social isolation leads patients to demonstrate more sensitivity to pain, lower self-esteem, less life satisfaction, increased depression.
  - Most at risk are patients suffering immune deficiencies, the elderly and those with a lack of common space in health care settings.
  - Games offer the following:
    - social interaction – a key reason people play
    - opportunity for electronically mediated communication through play (e.g., multiplayer online games)
    - variety of different formats across different platforms (e.g., consoles via TV, handheld devices, online and computer games), allowing the diversional therapist to cater to a variety of therapy situations



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- 3. Physical benefits
  - Encouraging physical activity amongst patients is a challenge (most physical activity occurs under supervision, but when alone, nearly two-thirds of patient time is spent being inactive).
  - Games offer the following:
    - they can easily be played without supervision
    - games differ in the mental processes and physical effort required to play (thereby tailoring to the individual is easy)
    - metabolic and physiological impact (visual attention + motor actions)
    - increased mental rotation, enhanced visual skills, improved eye-hand coordination and reaction time
    - more active games (i.e., exer-games) can increase energy expenditure and heart rate to similar levels achieved from other forms of physical activity (e.g., jogging)
    - aerobic training effects are possible



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## An example case

### Wii-Therapy



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## However, research is necessary

- Empirical studies in the medical and social science fields are needed to explore whether electronic games produce beneficial outcomes for diversional therapy patients.
  - RQ: How effective are electronic games at achieving psychological, social and physical outcomes for diversional therapy consumers vis-a-vis other interventions?
- Why research new interventions?
  - Government policies and campaigns recognise factors beyond medical treatment are necessary for the well-being of the population.
  - Diversional therapists face increasing pressure to deliver high quality service, demonstrated by research evidence of client outcomes (note consumer complaints concerning facilities and services).
  - Diversional therapists are under-valued professionally, providing a further impetus for the demonstration of their worth through consumer research.
- We make a contribution by identifying an intervention worthy of study.



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## THANK YOU....

## Questions?



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