An immersive DISTRACTION

Virtual-reality game helps young hemophilia patients endure prickly treatments

By JoAnne Viviano

Medical: 160 Main St., Penn Yan
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Dunn said many children think of themselves as superheroes.

The group has run a feasibility trial to make sure the device could be used in a pediatric hemophilia clinical trial. "It's led to genuine celebration from some people who work their entire lives and don't see change lives," said Patterson. "The moment when you see how it changes tears away from snowmen, drive-by sleigh riders and other environments that worked on the process, people tend to be the Ninja Turtles update. Kids can use it to pretend to be the Ninja Turtles and battle Shredder, visit the Smithsonian as a museum curator or go back in time to see dinosaurs and more. Free demos on Android / iOS. Visit http://www.discoveryvr.com/


Let your science-obsessed kid go from shark-infested ship to asteroid moments," he said. "The moment when you see how it changes tears away from snowmen, drive-by sleigh riders and other environments that worked on the process, people tend to be the Ninja Turtles update. Kids can use it to pretend to be the Ninja Turtles and battle Shredder, visit the Smithsonian as a museum curator or go back in time to see dinosaurs and more. Free demos on Android / iOS. Visit http://www.discoveryvr.com/

3. Snow Strike: The mission is to defend your snow fort against snowmen, driven by sleigh riders and other enemies, using a VR game. Visit http://damonpidhajecy.com/snowstrike

VR distractions to try

The app mentioned in this story is experimental and therefore not available for download. However, two kid-friendly VR apps (must provide your own smartphone and headset) if you need to distract children during their shots.


VR experiences created by Discovery.


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More trials, and funding, are needed before the device can be used on a wider scale.

Brody Bowman, 6, plays virtual-reality games while getting a medication infusion at Nationwide Children's Hospital. His mom, of Columbus, Ohio. "He doesn't flinch. He doesn't make a noise."

The needle sticks caused anxiety, screaming and crying. He had to be held still.

That’s why his mom, Gabby Bowman, was a bit surprised when Brody began sitting through the pokes with barely a stir.

"He gets totally immersed in it; he doesn’t even know what's going on,” said Bowman, of Columbus, Ohio. "He doesn’t flinch. He doesn’t make a noise."

The device is a disposable cardboard shell that holds a cellphone, slips over a patient's eyes, and immediately transports them to a virtual-reality experience.

Children, who need to hold their breath or sit still while a line is placed, control game play with a movement of the head or by breathing into a sensor. For example, one exercise makes a dragon fly around the room.

Dr. Amy Dunn, director of pediatric hematology at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, and Jeremy Patterson, who directs the research and development at the hospital's Research and Development user-experience technology, said the team recently switched to the device after seeing how patients dealt with the needles a little less traumatic.

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Care providers spend a lot of time trying to make it easier for patients. They start children young to make exposure to needles a little less traumatic.

But the virtual-reality gear takes things a step further. Bowman said her son doesn't even flinch when playing a game in which penguins stack ice blocks.

Once immersed in a virtual-reality game, children become quiet and unaware of what's going on around them, Patterson said.

"It’s led to genuine celebration moments," he said. "People have cheered. It's kids coming in crying and not wanting to be there, shifting over to people laughing. It's a complete 180.

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A busy hemophilia clinic.

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