Games technology to help in future dental training

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GLASGOW, UK: Dentists of the future could be using games technology to hone their clinical skills. Three final-year dental students at the University of Glasgow Dental School have developed the concept of using Wii technology to help dental students practise their operative skills.

The students were announced the winners of The Dental Innovation Technology Ideas Award last week. The competition challenged final-year students to develop an idea for a new piece of technology or innovation in the dental field.

The winning idea suggests the use of the Nintendo Wii console and special software to simulate operative techniques. The wireless controllers would be used by dental students to control the handling of instruments on a virtual patient on the screen. The controllers would also be used to provide sensory feedback to the user.

“Simulation of clinical procedures is normally carried out in the operative techniques lab. However, dental students sometimes have limited opportunity to practise their techniques outside of the lab,” said Dr David Watson of the University of Glasgow Dental School. “The use of Wii technology could be a really innovative and cost-effective solution which students could use to improve their manual dexterity.”

There is considerable research to back up the concept of using video games to improve dentists’ coordination, and the Wii-based application would complement the simulation technology already used in dental schools worldwide,” Dr Watson added.

The students—Pearse Hanigan, David Lagan and Adam Gray—were presented with a cheque for £300 and a glass obelisk by Craig Leaver, CEO of Dental Innovation, the competition sponsor.

Leaver said: “We received over 40 entries for the competition, all of which were of an extremely high standard. The judging panel were impressed by the depth of research and hard work which had gone into the submissions, which made it very difficult to choose an outright winner. However, we were struck by the inventiveness of adapting an existing piece of technology in a very novel way.”

“We are absolutely delighted that Glasgow Dental School has given us the opportunity to host this annual award,” he added. “As more dental practices become reliant on digital systems, it is vital that students are up to speed with the latest technologies. We hope the award will inspire them to think about how technology can be applied in practice for greater efficiency and better patient care.”

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann)