

PRESS RELEASE

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Virtual Peers Support People Living with HIV

Montreal, December 8, 2009 - Isabelle, Martin, Marc and Geneviève: these are the names of just some of the friendly virtual patients that people living with HIV can identify with or ask questions of to help them adhere to their antiretroviral medication program. Better integrating their medication routine into their daily lives is a challenge faced by people living with HIV. A virtual clinical research study entitled VIH-TAVIE ¹ (VIH-Traitement, Assistance Virtuelle Infirmière et Enseignement), currently underway at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal, gives them the opportunity to test a unique, innovative and user-friendly web application.

Integrating the taking of medication into one's lifestyle and adhering to the therapy in a variety of situations, such as while traveling or at a restaurant, can be complicated, and the drugs also have significant side effects. Patients are also confronted with life-changing trials and tribulations, in addition to the questioning and anxiety engendered by the therapy. Those participating in the study feel that they have gained the upper hand on their condition since they began to test the application. "I really have the impression that I have more control over everything surrounding taking my meds," remarks William Christopher Price, one of those who is testing the VIH-TAVIE web application.

"Of course this pharmacopoeia has saved their lives, but integrating various antiretroviral drugs, which must be taken according to a strict timetable and under other conditions, can be a real challenge in the long-term and become restricting and demanding. Many people become discouraged and feel powerless about the changes in their lives," states José Côté, N., Ph.D., a researcher at the CRCHUM, principal researcher for the VIH-TAVIE project and holder of the Chair on new nursing practices at the Université de Montréal.

Considering the incidence and prevalence of chronic health problems and their impacts on health services, new ways of delivering care can provide added value to existent services, by offering an additional alternative to the management of taking medication. The originality of this web application is in its interactive process with the user, which differs from other information sites in which interaction is minimal. As well, both the virtual and the real nurse (who are one in the same), Geneviève Rouleau, study coordinator, ensures feedback about and positive reinforcement of the patients' efforts to manage their care during computer sessions. The virtual assistant personified by the nurse engages patients in a learning process and development of self-management skills for their antiretroviral therapy.

The application was developed jointly with Yann-Gaël Guéhéneuc of the École Polytechnique de Montréal and the Multimedia Service, CHUM. The VIH-TAVIE project receives financial support from the Fonds de recherche en santé du Québec and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

¹ The acronym "TAVIE" is a play on words—HIV-*ta vie* (your life). It stands for treatment, virtual nurse assistance and teaching.

For requests for interviews with someone who has participated in the study and with members of the VIH-TAVIE research team:

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