

Magellan Expands Knowledge on Virtual Reality Therapy for Treatment of Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

AVON, Conn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 12, 2008--Magellan Health Services, Inc., the nation's leading manager of behavioral health care, hosted top virtual reality (VR) therapy and anxiety disorder expert Barbara Rothbaum, Ph.D., ABPP, today at the company's annual conference of its clinical and medical leadership team. Rothbaum, director of the Trauma and Anxiety Recovery Program and professor of psychiatry at Emory University's School of Medicine, pioneered the development of a virtual-reality based program to treat anxiety disorders--a program that is now also being widely used to address posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in war veterans. Magellan is exploring ways to include virtual reality therapy as part of its treatment tools in managing PTSD for veterans.

According to the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, an average of 30 percent of war veterans experience PTSD, which can develop after exposure to traumatic events such as military combat and can cause flashbacks and bad dreams about the event, emotional numbness, intense guilt or anxiety, sleeplessness or other debilitating symptoms. While the military has used VR techniques in combat training for a number of years, only in the past 15 years has it been applied to the treatment of PTSD through Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET).

"VRET uses a new medium to deliver exposure therapy, one of the most evidence-based methods of treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder," said Rothbaum. "The virtual environments used in this type of therapy are more than just multimedia. They're active experiences that immerse patients back in the situations in which their most traumatic experiences occurred so they can see, hear, feel and smell their surroundings. Each environment is tailored to individuals' personal experience so they feel as though they're re-living the event over and over again, but in a therapeutic manner. Through this process, they eventually handle the experience more adaptively and it becomes a less invasive part of their current lives," she said.

VR therapy sessions take place in a therapist's office and require a head-mounted display with a position tracker, sensor and hand-tracker; a computer and monitor, headphones and a microphone. The patient sits on a raised platform with a bass shaker underneath that produces vibrations consistent with the virtual environment. In addition to the Virtual Iraq and Virtual Vietnam programs used with war veterans, experts have created environments ranging from a unique event such as the collapse of the World Trade Center to a much more common occurrence such as a motor vehicle accident, all to help individuals overcome PTSD.*

"We're honored that Dr. Rothbaum was able to share her research with us about virtual reality therapy and how it can be applied to PTSD, and we're investigating how we can leverage that expertise to further enhance our offerings in the future," said Russell C. Petrella, Ph.D., president of behavioral health for Magellan. "Many war veterans are turning to the private sector for treatment of PTSD and, as a company, we're always looking for new and more effective ways to treat it."

Rothbaum's presentation was in conjunction with a three-day clinical leadership conference Magellan hosted this week to exchange organizational and industry best practices.

About Magellan: Headquartered in Avon, Conn., Magellan Health Services, Inc. (Nasdaq:MGLN) is a leading specialty health care management organization. Its customers include health plans, corporations and government agencies.

*Disclosure: Dr. Rothbaum is a full-time professor in psychiatry at Emory University School of Medicine but is a co-owner of Virtually Better, Inc., which makes virtual environments similar to those described in her presentation. This conflict of interest has been disclosed and is managed by Emory University's Conflict of Interest Committee.

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