

New Technology Empowers Doctors to Combat Prescription Drug Addiction

With millions of Americans abusing prescription drugs and rates of fatal overdose soaring, many doctors struggle with how to provide their patients needed medicine without feeding the addiction epidemic. SIMmersion's Prescription Drug and Pain Management Training Simulation, created in partnership with researchers at Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin—Madison, trains doctors in patient-centered techniques to address the prescription drug crisis without compromising care.

Columbia, MD ([PRWEB](#)) November 21, 2013 -- Today, a teen in New Mexico will pop a friend's Adderall to help him study for an exam.

A woman in Florida will take some expired Xanax to get through a sleepless night.

A man in West Virginia will swallow a few extra OxyContin because the old dosage isn't stopping the pain like it used to.

People make choices like these all across the country, every day. A comprehensive report this year from [Trust for America's Health](#) states that roughly one in every fifty Americans is abusing or misusing prescription drugs, a rate that has exploded since 1999. According to the [report](#), there are more overdose deaths per year from prescription painkillers than from heroin and cocaine combined. In a majority of states, drug poisoning has become the number one cause of injury death, even higher than traffic accidents.

America's doctors are on the front lines of this public health crisis. Prescription painkillers, stimulants and sedatives are crucial tools physicians can employ to treat patients and alleviate their suffering. But when the potential for misuse is so high, many medical professionals struggle with the decision to prescribe or not to prescribe. "Questions about the benefits and risks of chronic analgesic therapy mean that... more work will be needed to assure that no one suffers needlessly from pain," says June Dahl, PhD, Professor of Neuroscience at the [University of Wisconsin—Madison](#).

In response to this training need, [SIMmersion](#) developed a partnership with the [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#) and researchers at [Northwestern University](#) and the [University of Wisconsin—Madison](#). Together, the team created the Prescription Drug and Pain Management Training System. This state-of-the-art training system with role-playing simulations helps physicians build skills in three different dimensions of this complex public health topic:

- Screening patients for risk factors of prescription drug misuse and abuse
- Empowering low-risk patients to use their medication responsibly by introducing prescription agreements
- Transitioning high-risk patients from opioid medications to alternative pain management therapies

Physicians can review comprehensive e-learning at their own pace and put their skills into practice in three life-like conversations with Tom Kramer, a simulated patient created using SIMmersion's PeopleSim engine. Tom is a new patient looking to refill an oxycodone prescription his previous doctor gave him for back pain.

A groundbreaking emotional model makes Tom Kramer's responses realistic. The quality of the doctor's "bedside manner" throughout the conversation has a direct effect on how cooperative and open Tom is in his

answers. His personality is different in each conversation, as are his responses to the user. For example, in the screening conversation, sometimes he is an ideal candidate for opioid painkillers and sometimes he is simply a scammer out to sell the oxycodone. Because Tom's responses and motivations differ every time the doctor uses the simulation, the skills developed in the training are more likely to generalize to a variety of real-world situations.

Detailed feedback from an on-screen coach is available at every moment during the simulation, so no teachable moments are missed. Additionally, a comprehensive after-action review gives a breakdown of the user's performance with constructive suggestions for how to improve. In SIMmersion's training systems, users are free to try different approaches and make mistakes in their conversations, building their skills without fear of the consequences of real-world failure. No special equipment is needed for the training, so doctors can conduct their training anytime, on any computer, getting the repeat practice that makes skills second nature.

The Prescription Drug and Pain Management Training System is one of SIMmersion's most ambitious and intricate products, with hours of training across three separate simulated conversations. The scope of the project reflects the complexity of the prescription drug epidemic, and the need among prescribing physicians to have a system that provides real training, not simplistic answers. "If we could convince every front-line clinician in the country to spend 4-5 hours playing this simulation," says Dr. Michael Fleming of [Northwestern University](#), "we could dramatically decrease rates of opioid overdose and opioid-related harm." SIMmersion is proud to be part of the national effort to help doctors keep their patients safe and stem the tide of prescription drug misuse.

SIMmersion's PeopleSim® level 4 interactive training systems can now be delivered as a SCORM-compliant web-based application, on DVDs, and through mobile platforms. These systems can be made 508 compliant. For more information, contact [SIMmersion](#) online or call at 443-283-2555.



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