

Virtual Training Systems Offer Hope to People With Depression

As depression affects nearly one in ten Americans, the nation's healthcare providers constantly strive to help their patients and clients cope with the debilitating mental illness. [SIMmersion's](#) newly expanded suite of virtual conversations for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) trains responders on how to understand depression and save lives.

Columbia, MD ([PRWEB](#)) December 17, 2013 -- As depression affects nearly one in ten Americans, the nation's healthcare providers constantly strive to help their patients and clients cope with the debilitating mental illness. [SIMmersion's](#) newly expanded suite of virtual conversations for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) trains responders on how to understand depression and save lives.

Do you have trouble falling asleep, or getting out of bed?

Do you have trouble concentrating?

Is the list of things that give you pleasure a small one, and getting smaller?

The [Center for Disease Control](#) asked eight questions like these to hundreds of thousands of adults in the US in an unprecedented effort to determine just how common depression is. The sobering finding was that nearly ten percent of adults met the medical criteria for a depressive disorder; not the sort of sadness that comes and goes in any life, but an emotional weight heavy enough to hinder a person's ability to work, participate, and stay healthy. Depression is also one of the top two risk factors for suicide; along with substance abuse disorders, 90% of people who take their lives struggle with the condition, reports the [National Institute for Mental Health](#).

SIMmersion's newly expanded suite of virtual training conversations for responders of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline helps them understand depression and give hope to callers in crisis. The Lifeline answers an average of 89,000 calls a month in crisis centers around the country, according to the department of [Health and Human Services](#). Providing nonjudgmental support to the people who call the hotline is a delicate skill necessary to help navigate moments of crisis. SIMmersion's training suite lets responders build their skills through realistic virtual calls before they interact with the broader population.

SIMmersion's training includes conversations with:

- Ray Scott, a man so overwhelmed by his depression that he's prepared to commit suicide. By listening to Ray's story, users give him the chance to voice his negative thoughts, work his way through them and decide to stay safe.
- Amy Walker, a woman who fears that her ex-boyfriend may be considering suicide. Amy, like many people who know individuals at risk for suicide, is anxious about what steps to take, especially because their relationship is complicated. Users can offer Amy support and gather the information necessary to reach out to her ex-boyfriend before a tragedy occurs.
- Tyler Matthews, a veteran whose PTSD symptoms and difficulties transitioning to civilian life are making him consider suicide. This brand-new training conversation helps responders navigate the specifics of serving veterans and draws on additional resources from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A state-of-the-art conversation engine called PeopleSim allows SIMmersion to create these virtual characters, each of whom has hundreds of possible responses to what a user says during the conversation. The characters have realistic emotions that change in the course of the conversation, demonstrating more or less trust in the user depending on how supportive or antagonistic the user's choices are. Video of real actors is used to make the conversation feel as close to a face-to-face meeting as possible.

In each of these conversations, responders receive feedback from an on-screen coach with constructive suggestions for how to proceed. A comprehensive after-action review lets users see how well they met their objectives and what areas they can improve in to serve their callers better in the future.

The Lifeline simulations help responders react to the needs of people with depression in time to avert tragedy. Other SIMmersion products take a preventative look at depression by training physicians and counselors to screen their patients or clients for depression in the course of discussions on substance abuse or chronic pain. More information on SIMmersion's healthcare training products is available at www.simmersion.com.

Because SIMmersion's systems can be delivered online and require no specialized equipment, the training is as accessible as possible to as many providers as possible. Given the prevalence of depression, and the need for exemplary training across the health care system, the fact that robust training is more available than ever is one reason to be hopeful about a brighter 2014 in the field of mental health.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available toll-free 24/7 anywhere in the United States. To talk to a responder, dial 1800-273-TALK (8255) or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.



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