

Boston University Medical School Launches Virtual Social Determinants of Health Simulator with Virtway's Technology

Using 3D immersive technology, the Simulator helps healthcare professionals and other care providers understand the Social Determinants of Health that frequently prevent lower income Americans from achieving positive health outcomes.



Massachusetts, Boston, Apr 5, 2021 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Virtway and Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) announced today their joint collaboration through their product called the Virtual Social Determinants of Health Simulator that each 1st year BU Medical Student has completed. All 160 first-year medical students participated in a first-of-its-kind role-playing exercise inside Virtway's 3D virtual environment technology. Led by BUSM's Pablo Buitron de la Vega, MD, assistant professor of medicine, and BUSM medical students Celia Greenlaw, Lauren Dzera, Oluwatomisin Bello, Andrew Vallejo, BUSM continues to advance the fields of Community Health and Social Determinants of Health as they build innovative educational experiences and curricula. BUSM Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs Suzanne C. Sarfaty, MD, and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Priya S. Garg, MD, supported the development and implementation of the initiative.

By working with Virtway, BUSM was able to develop an immersive training environment in which participants can experience some of the day-to-day challenges that people residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged homes face, including stress, lack of access to basic needs and services, and the consequences of both on wellbeing and health outcomes. Virtway and BUSM believe that their collaborative efforts to develop virtual environments will help to better prepare healthcare professionals to provide care to vulnerable populations.

Students were assigned a role and learned the background of one of 20 different individuals facing the social and health effects of hardship. They then went into Virtway's 3D virtual environments from their own devices where they faced two virtual weeks in the life of their persona (which was condensed into 60 minutes).

The goal for the medical students is to understand the difficulties that socioeconomically disadvantaged families face by immersing in interactions with social services, schools, and healthcare professionals. The findings and results from the simulation will be submitted for publication with an eye toward expanding to other academic institutions throughout the U.S. as well as Central and South America. Beyond this program, Dr. Buitron de la Vega and BUSM will continue to study and adapt medical education to meet and advance the needs of the most vulnerable.

Virtway develops innovative 3D virtual environments for social impact. With the company's 3D virtual event & training technology, organizations can offer stakeholders worldwide access to immersive virtual training platforms from the devices they already use.

Caring for the underserved is a core value shared by the BUSM community. For more than 20 years, BU medical students participate in the Outreach Van Project, which provides basic necessities and care every week to the underserved community in East Boston. In addition, they participate in the Homeless Health Immersion Experience, which aims to educate future doctors in the unique challenges of medical care for the homeless population through hands-on service-learning experiences. Medical students at BU also take part in the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Challenge which raises awareness of the food insecurity crisis by starting an open and honest dialogue about the reality of food insecurity and the difficulties people and families face when they are food insecure. Through its diversity of thought and immersive academic experiences, BUSM graduates go on to lead in medicine and medical sciences around the world.

About Virtway

Virtway is a unique immersive platform that provides virtual 3D online experiences, such as conferences, trade shows and training sessions, used by large companies like Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Roche, Accenture, AstraZeneca and Naturgy and thousands of people for all kinds of events. Users can talk, interact and network in real-time in immersive environments through avatars, recreating the feeling of direct contact and offering a more engaging experience than webinars, videos, and conference calls.

About Boston University Medical School

Originally established in 1848 as the New England Female Medical College, and incorporated into Boston University in 1873, Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) today is a leading academic medical center with an enrollment of more than 700 medical students and 1,180 students pursuing degrees in graduate medical sciences. BUSM faculty contribute to more than 605 active grants and contracts, with total anticipated awards valued at more than \$211 million in amyloidosis, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, cancer, infectious diseases, pulmonary disease and dermatology, among other areas. The School's teaching affiliates include Boston Medical Center, its primary teaching hospital, the Boston VA Healthcare System, Kaiser Permanente in northern California, as well as Boston HealthNet, a network of 15 community health centers. For more information, please visit

<http://www.bumc.bu.edu/busm/>

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