
Online Fachtagung

«Chronisch krank in der digitalen Welt»

ABSTRACT – Raum 12

Readily available Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) for Specific Phobias

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Specific phobias are frequent mental disorders which respond well to exposure therapy, but often remain untreated due to organizational difficulties in confronting patients with their feared stimulus or situation within therapeutic contexts. For instance, treatments of height phobias typically require the therapist to join a patient in a trip to a tower or a bridge and treatments of spider phobia require the therapist to keep at least one such animal, both of which is often not feasible within clinical work environments. Over the last two decades, virtual reality (VR) technology was therefore employed in several test cases to confront patients with their feared stimulus or situation in a naturalistic but easily controllable setup, and was demonstrated to allow for comparable reductions in phobic symptoms as in real habituation environments. Such Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) programs have, in principle, become more accessible with the advent of low-cost consumer hardware, but therapists still lack readily available and easy-to-use software. The presented project, funded by Schweizerische Gesellschaft für kognitive Verhaltenstherapie (SGVT), will close this gap by developing and testing state-of-the-art VR treatment programs for height and spider phobia and making these available to licensed therapists in Switzerland. Treatment programs will follow established principles in exposure therapy but also extend previous works in terms of personalization (i.e. allow to more specifically address fears towards individual behaviors in spiders) and ease-of-use. Here we present the stage of progress in this ongoing research project.