
VR for Side Symptom Alleviation



The use of virtual reality (VR) in haemodialysis patients helps alleviate the side symptoms such as fatigue, lightheadedness and nausea, a new study shows (Hernandez et al. 2021).

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Virtual reality (VR) is being increasingly deployed in pain management and psychological phobias treatment. A team of researchers from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign set out to assess how VR-enabled therapy would affect patients during maintenance haemodialysis treatment sessions, for which the usual side symptoms include fatigue, nausea, lightheadedness, and headaches. Further on, they tested if VR would cause motion-related discomfort (cybersickness, which is common) in patients.

The VR programme for each of the 20 patients enrolled in the study included two fully immersive 25-minute mindfulness training and guided meditation sessions, in the beginning or closer to the end of the treatment procedure, with patients wearing a head-mounted display. The participants reported on their motion-related symptoms and discomfort and on utility measures of interacting with the VR interface.

The results showed that VR use had led to a significant reduction in feelings such as cybersickness, fatigue and disorientation (22.6 vs. 11.2; $p=0.03$, with scores >20 indicating problematic immersion). The average usability score for the system was 82.8 out of 100 and the patients felt calmed and “distracted” from the treatment routine.

While the authors concluded that “VR programs may be a safe platform to improve the dialysis patient experience”, they cautioned that in the absence of a control group causality could not be pinpointed and the alleviation in symptoms might have been caused by other factors. As a next step, the researchers underscore the need to conduct a randomised trial and explore a wider scope of VR applications.

Source: [University of Illinois News Bureau](#)

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