

SimCoach

Reducing Barriers to Care for Military Personnel and Families
2009-present

The SimCoach project develops virtual human support agents to serve as online guides for promoting access to psychological healthcare information and for assisting military personnel, veterans and family members — particularly those who might not otherwise seek help — in breaking down barriers to initiating care, including mental health support.

The SimCoach goal is to motivate users to take the first step and seek information and advice with regard to their healthcare, including psychological health, traumatic brain injury and addiction; and their general personal welfare, including external stressors such as economic or transition issues. If determined necessary, SimCoach will encourage users to take the next step towards seeking more traditional resources.

The SimCoach virtual support agents do not deliver diagnosis or treatment, nor do they aim to replace human providers and experts. Rather, SimCoach characters provide users an accessible and anonymous way engage in a dialogue about healthcare concerns.

By guiding the user through a sequence of user-specific exercises and assessments, SimCoach characters are able to solicit basic anonymous background information about the user's history and clinical/psychosocial concerns. With this information they can provide advice and support, direct the user to relevant online content, and potentially facilitate the process of seeking appropriate care with a live clinical provider.

The project features ICT's first web-based interactive virtual human and is currently being rolled out to select users for data collection and analysis in order to improve the application and refine process for public online virtual humans. A customized, regional SimCoach is also currently running on the Braveheart website, a veteran support initiative of the Atlanta Braves and Emory University at: <http://braveheartveterans.org>. This work is currently funded by the The U.S. Army Research Laboratory's Army Research Office (ARO). Previous support came from the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) and the Telemedicine & Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC).



At the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies leaders in artificial intelligence, graphics, virtual reality and narrative advance low-cost immersive techniques and technologies to solve problems facing service members, students and society.