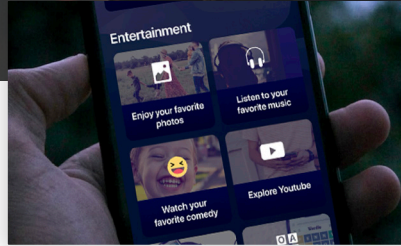


Battle Buddy for Suicide Prevention

2022 - Current

Project Leader: Sharon Mozgai, Albert “Skip” Rizzo, and Arno Hartholt



Background

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Mission Daybreak Challenge is a 10-year strategy to end Veteran suicide through a comprehensive, public health approach. In response to a call for proposals in 2022, ICT's MedVR and Integrated Virtual Humans teams proposed Battle Buddy for Suicide Prevention, an AI-driven mobile health (mHealth) application tailored exclusively for Veterans.

The virtual human (VH) component of Battle Buddy is a computer-based dialogue system with virtual embodiment, utilizing various multi-modal language cues such as text, speech, animated facial expressions, and gestures to interact with users. Inspired by the U.S. military practice of assigning fellow soldiers as partners to provide mutual assistance in both combat and non-combat situations, the name “Battle Buddy” symbolizes this app’s mission.

Objectives

Battle Buddy’s comprehensive approach aims to establish a suicide prevention ecosystem that can be customized to meet the unique needs of individual users. Battle Buddy not only provides valuable in-app health and wellness content, it also acts as a springboard to real-world support networks, including friends, family, and various resources provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL). Veterans will also be able to opt-in to connect their wearable devices (sleep sensors, exercise trackers, etc.) to gain a better understanding, and develop agency, towards their body/mind holistic health.

In the event of a suicidal crisis, Battle Buddy’s primary focus shifts to guiding Veterans through their personalized safety plan, with the goal of creating time and space between suicidal thoughts and actions. By doing so, the app aims to play a crucial role in saving lives and providing the necessary support during critical moments.

Results

Battle Buddy for Suicide Prevention is currently in development employing a user-centered design process to include Veterans in every step of the way. An early prototype received the award for Best Technical Demonstration at the International Conference for Persuasive Technology 2023, a top interdisciplinary conference focused on work at the intersection of computer science and psychology.

Mozgai, S., Rizzo, A. & Hartholt, A. Persuasive Technology for Suicide Prevention: A Virtual Human mHealth Application. In Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Persuasive Technologies, 2023. Best technical demonstration award.

Next Steps

User-testing of Battle Buddy for Suicide Prevention will begin in the winter of 2023.

Published academic research papers are available from <https://ict.usc.edu/research/publications>
(Search engine keyword: USC ICT Publications)

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