

# Interprofessional Palliative Care Training in a Virtual World

Suzanne Mitchell MD, Amy Lee, MD, Rebecca Koeniger-Donohue  
Tufts University School of Medicine; Simmons College

**Background:** Barriers to effective end-of-life (EOL) care include the lack of health professional education around palliative care and advanced care planning (ACP), the absence of interprofessional education (IPE), and the poor availability of palliative care services compared to the growing demand.

**Pilot study:** This study tested the feasibility and acceptability of using virtual world technology in palliative care IPE. Fifteen students from different health professional training programs at Tufts Medical School and Simmons College (doctors, nurses, social workers, dieticians) were convened to participate.

## Objectives:

- 1) To examine the feasibility of using the virtual world platform as an effective space to teach communication of ACP
- 2) To explore how students respond to this learning environment

**Activity Description:** A two-hour long workshop on ACP was conducted in the virtual world. The workshop, led by two clinicians certified in family medicine and palliative care, consisted of a 30-minute didactic lecture on ACP followed by role-play practice with expert coaching using standardized patients. Students and instructors participated via avatar in virtual world 3D simulated setting.

**Assessment:** 31% of participants pre-workshop felt they had confidence discussing ACP; 85% of participants post-workshop believed they had average to high confidence.

**Evaluation:** 77% of participants would “definitely recommend” this education program on ACP.

## Learner’s Comments:

*“The combination of social interaction and privacy... incentivized [me] to speak up... The virtual world is the best platform to learn about advanced directives because it is a difficult conversation to have.”*

*“The sense of no judgments that virtual life provided made it easier to have a difficult conversation.”*



**Impact:** This virtual world study marks an important first step in supporting the viability of this platform for future IPE training in ACP, and supports further research and experimentation with education in the virtual world.