

Mood and Learning in Health Care Settings

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Health care practitioners are trained to deal with patients' emotionally intense situations, and being able to listen and explain complex issues to patients is an essential attribute of a health care professional [1]. However, practitioners might not be aware that their emotional state influences their perceptions of the world, what they remember and decisions they take [2].

Emotions are considered feelings, and that bodily change occurs after an emotion is experienced. However, according to the perceptual theory of emotion, bodily changes precede emotional experiences, which in turn, modulate mental processes. In such theory, emotions are seen as 'cognitive', rather than a subjective phenomenon. The experience of the world shapes our emotional representation of it, and in turn, our emotional predisposition does not affect only our behaviour, but also our inclination towards the events in our life [3,4]. In a recent study, we found that emotions also influenced the amount of information people learned and the knowledge transferred from the training into the real world [5].

McConnell and Eva extensively reviewed the literature on the influence of emotion in learning and the resulting transfer of skills and knowledge to the real world [6]. They concluded that emotion influences how learners identify, perceive, interpret information and act during training. They advocated that more research is needed in the area of emotion and learning to ensure that trainees are effectively prepared for any emotional condition in the real world.

We investigated how mood influenced learning and found that participants felt significantly happier after gaining knowledge in serious or applied games, a game designed to fulfil an objective, rather than mere entertainment [5]. As such, serious games can contribute to the creation of pleasurable learning experience. We also found that men were happier than women to learn through playing applied games.

However, after a game-based experience, women who became happier (and younger people) demonstrated higher recall of knowledge and better performance in the real world.

Currently, 77% of the health care professionals in the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK are women [7]. On the strength of these findings, we suggest that serious games should be widely adopted as a training method for health care professionals and in particular, for women. They do not only offer a safe environment in which to see the consequences of one's decisions, but they also allow learners to learn and experiment with emotion regulation. They moreover offer an opportunity to improve trainees' mood, which consequently increases learning performance and transfer of knowledge to the real world.

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