

A TABLET GAME FOR RISK REDUCTION AND HIV PREVENTION IN ADOLESCENTS

Kimberly Hieftje,¹ Lindsay Duncan,¹ Benjamin Sawyer,² Sabrina Haskell,² Lynn Fiellin,¹

¹Yale University, ²Digitalmill, ³Schell Games

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND Thirty-nine percent of new HIV infections in 2009 occurred among individuals aged 13-29 years. Videogames are ubiquitous, can improve health behavior, but have not been evaluated as a tool for HIV/AIDS prevention in adolescents.

PURPOSE To develop and evaluate a videogame designed to help teens acquire and practice skills to avoid or reduce overall and HIV risk behaviors.

METHODS Yale's Play2PreventTM, Digitalmill, and Schell Games are developing PlayForward: Elm City Stories, a videogame that incorporates evidence-based tools for behavior change. We will evaluate the efficacy of the game by conducting a randomized trial in 330 youths assigned to play PlayForward or a commercial videogame. Subjects will play two sessions/week of their assigned game for six weeks. Assessments will evaluate the game's efficacy for reducing risk and promoting good decision making.

RESULTS The videogame will be ready for testing as a final playable iPad product in late Fall 2012. The player uses a personalized avatar to "travel" through life, making decisions and facing challenges in a repetitive and meaningful way, equipping them with skills that potentially translate to real life. During this talk we will describe how an originally planned desktop application was quickly retooled for touch interface tablets. While many traditional desktop and Web-based applications will easily move to tablet and mobile phone frameworks, understanding some of the nuances involved will provide new insights. We will outline specific approaches to game development for behavior change and discuss the potential global implications of our work.

CONCLUSIONS This videogame represents a paradigm shift, hopefully providing evidence for the role of games as risk reduction and HIV/AIDS prevention in youth. Videogame technology has the potential to expand the available vehicles for HIV/AIDS prevention to the increasing number of electronic gaming platforms including mobile technologies, creating a new venue for public health interventions.