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Addiction therapists signing up to World of Warcraft

Medical staff are creating their own 'avatars' in online fantasy games such as World of Warcraft in the hope of treating youngsters addicted to virtual worlds.



One of the main draws at BlizzCon is World of Warcraft

By Claudine Beaumont, Technology Editor

11:35AM BST 24 Jul 2009



[Comment \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/5899659/Addiction-therapists-signing-up-to-World-of-Warcraft.html#discus_thread\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/5899659/Addiction-therapists-signing-up-to-World-of-Warcraft.html#discus_thread)

Experts have said that some massively multiplayer online games, in which players battle enemies for weapons and rewards, are as addictive as crack cocaine.

Dr Richard Graham, a consultant psychiatrist at the Tavistock Centre in London, is so concerned that he plans to provide online therapy for youngsters who are spending so much time playing these games that they have lost touch with the real world.

A recent report by Sweden's Youth Care Foundation described World of Warcraft as "more addictive than crack cocaine". The game, which attracts almost 12 million players every month, is set in a fantasy environment, with users taking on the characters of dwarves, elves and wizards, interacting with other players throughout the virtual world.

Dr Graham said that some players were so addicted to these massively multiplayer online games that they played them for up to 16 hours a day, leading them to neglect their social lives and education.

He has called on Blizzard Entertainment, the company that makes World of Warcraft, to waive or discount the costs associated with joining the game so that therapists can more easily communicate with at-risk players in their preferred environment.

[Virtual world is a real money maker \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/5344839/Virtual-world-is-a-real-money-maker.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/5344839/Virtual-world-is-a-real-money-maker.html)

[World of Warcraft maker tops list of succesful video games developers \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/5312650/World-of-Warcraft-maker-tops-list-of-succesful-video-games-developers.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/5312650/World-of-Warcraft-maker-tops-list-of-succesful-video-games-developers.html)

[World of Warcraft 'more addictive than cocaine' \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/4863325/World-of-Warcraft-more-addictive-than-cocaine.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/4863325/World-of-Warcraft-more-addictive-than-cocaine.html)

[Bafta video games nominations announced \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/4580502/Bafta-video-games-nominations-announced.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/4580502/Bafta-video-games-nominations-announced.html)

[Caution over online game theft \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/6689741/Man-given-police-caution-for-RuneScape-online-game-theft.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/6689741/Man-given-police-caution-for-RuneScape-online-game-theft.html)

[Teach children through video games \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/4060646/Video-games-like-World-of-Warcraft-and-Second-Life-could-be-used-for-education.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/4060646/Video-games-like-World-of-Warcraft-and-Second-Life-could-be-used-for-education.html)

"We will be launching this project by the end of the year. I think it's already clear that psychiatrists will have to stay within the parameters of the game. They certainly wouldn't be wandering around the game in white coats and would have to use the same characters available to other players," said Dr Graham.

"Of course one problem we're going to have to overcome is that while a psychiatrist may excel in what they do in the real world, they're probably not going to be very good at playing World of Warcraft.

"We may have to work at that if we are going to get through to those who play this game for hours at end."

One solution proposed by Dr Graham is recruiting existing players to act as "peer mentors" for other users of the game. He said that internet addiction was very difficult to identify, as the isolation involved meant sufferers were often out of sight and out of mind.

"Those effected don't exhibit the same outward warning signs as most teenage anti-social behaviour issues do because they're in their bedrooms most of the time, seemingly out of trouble. Because of this we can't get through to them in the traditional educational environment or intrude on their actual bedrooms, we need to turn to the internet itself to tackle these problems."

Blizzard Entertainment was unavailable for comment at the time of publication.

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The Telegraph

Rehab clinic for children internet and technology addicts founded

Britain's first internet rehab clinic has been founded amid fears children as young as 12 are addicted to the web, computer games and mobile phones.



The clinic has been founded amid fears that some children were damaging their health by their overuse of computers. Photo: ALAMY



By [Andrew Hough \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/andrew-hough/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/andrew-hough/)

7:00AM GMT 18 Mar 2010

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Capio Nightingale Hospital, in central London, has launched the first addiction service which allows young people to go "cold turkey" from their technology compulsion.

The service, which will be offered for children as young as 12, comes amid growing concerns about children's behaviour with technology which puts their health at risk and has led to police being called to sort out family disputes.

Children will be forced to go "cold turkey" from their technology use as well as being encouraged to cut out any problem use, such as computer games, and restrict the time spent using their phone or computer.

They would also be taught face-to face social skills at a residential unit.

It also encourages them to think about their relationship with their phone, computer games or social networking websites like Facebook and teaches them skills to help them to switch off.

Student technology addiction 'same as drug cravings' (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/8436831/Student-addiction-to-technology-similar-to-drug-cravings-study-finds.html>)

Nine in 10 of young people turn to internet for help in solving personal problems (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/digital-media/7456633/Nine-in-10-of-young-people-turn-to-internet-for-help-in-solving-personal-problems.html>)

Johnson to quiz Facebook over 'panic button' (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/7466896/Johnson-to-quiz-Facebook-over-panic-button.html>)

Facebook: millions feel 'too unattractive' for social networking site (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/7464239/Facebook-millions-feel-too-unattractive-for-social-networking-site.html>)

The treatment package may also include a look at body image and physical health if the addiction has affected the child's confidence, activity levels or diet.

The treatment aims to increase off-screen social activities and improve the person's confidence in face-to-face situations, the lack of which may have made them more susceptible to technology addiction.

Strategies to deal with online problems, like cyber bullying, may also be part of intensive in-patient care, group or individual therapy.

Consultant psychiatrist Dr Richard Graham, who is leading the new addiction treatment, said services need to "adapt quickly" to help young people affected by technology addiction - who he dubbed "screenagers" - rather than sticking with the same treatment models used for substance abuse.

He said a growing number of parents had told him about when their children flew "into a rage" when they were told to turn off their computer.

Police had even been called to sort out some rows, he added.

Dr Graham said technology addicts, whom were like gambling addicts, were hyper-stimulated so they were "always on the alert" and could suffer withdrawal symptoms like agitation.

"I've been contacted by parents who see their children going into a rage when they're told to turn off their computer. Some end up having to call the police," he said.

Dr Graham said children played some computer games for the social contact, adding: "It gives them a sense of connection so they end up playing all the time."

"What we need are official guidelines now on what counts as healthy or unhealthy use of technology," he told the London Evening Standard.

"Mental health services need to adapt quickly to the changing worlds that young people inhabit, and understand just how seriously their lives can be impaired by unregulated time online, on-screen or in-game.

"We have found that many of the existing services fail to recognise the complexity of these situations, borrowing from older models of addiction and substance misuse to very limited effect.

"This is why Capio Nightingale Hospital has launched the first Young Person Technology Addiction Service, which we hope will address the underlying causes of this addiction to transform screenagers back into teenagers."

Other clinics, including The Priory, offer treatment for internet addiction but have no dedicated service for young people.

A spokeswoman said the service will be offered for children as young as 12 but those aged 15 to 17 are expected to be the main target group.

She said the service did not aim to make children give up technology use completely, instead they are encouraged to cut out any problem use - like computer games - and restrict the time spent using their phone or computer.

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