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THE VIRTUAL LIFESAVERS

ST GEORGE'S STUDENTS TEST THEIR SKILLS IN ONLINE GAME

By LINDSAY BURNS

IT'S HARD to imagine that letting students sit around playing computer games could help save lives.

But when a virtual reality internet game is used as a pioneering tool to prepare paramedics to help the sick and injured before hitting the streets, it seems like a surprising possibility.

Trainees studying for a paramedical science foundation degree at St George's University in Tooting have joined millions of people worldwide who inhabit the virtual world Second Life - often masquerading as dragons, gangsters, millionaires and wizards to live out their fantasies.

Typical scenarios the students might face in real life have been developed in cyber-space, to give them a chance to play the part of a paramedic and test their skills and knowledge.

One such scene features an apparently

drunk woman slumped against a wall. Students can check her pulse and access equipment found in ambulances.

Emily Conradi, e-projects manager at the faculty of health and social care sciences, said: "Paramedic students spend a lot of time in work placements, so it can be hard for the students to meet face to face.

"The advantage of Second Life is that it feels more real. Students get a sense of being there together and can decide what to do from what they can see in front of them."

The students are sent one of five scenarios a week and work in groups of three or four to tend to the virtual patient.

Fiona Cropp, a second year paramedic student who has tested the application, said: "It's a really useful tool. It's much better to be able to actually perform treatments rather than just talk about them."



Paramedical-science student James Lafferty plays online game Second Life. Inset, virtual medics attend a drunk girl during a game session

ROB LOGAN/31743/6; Inset, c9637/C

