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Online saving

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 an incredible possibility.

Trainees on the Paramedical Science Foundation degree at St George's University in Tooting have joined millions of people worldwide who inhabit the online world of Second Life – often masquerading as dragons, gangsters, millionaires and wizards.

By LINDSAY BURNS

Typical scenarios the students might face in real life have been developed online, giving 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 all the 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

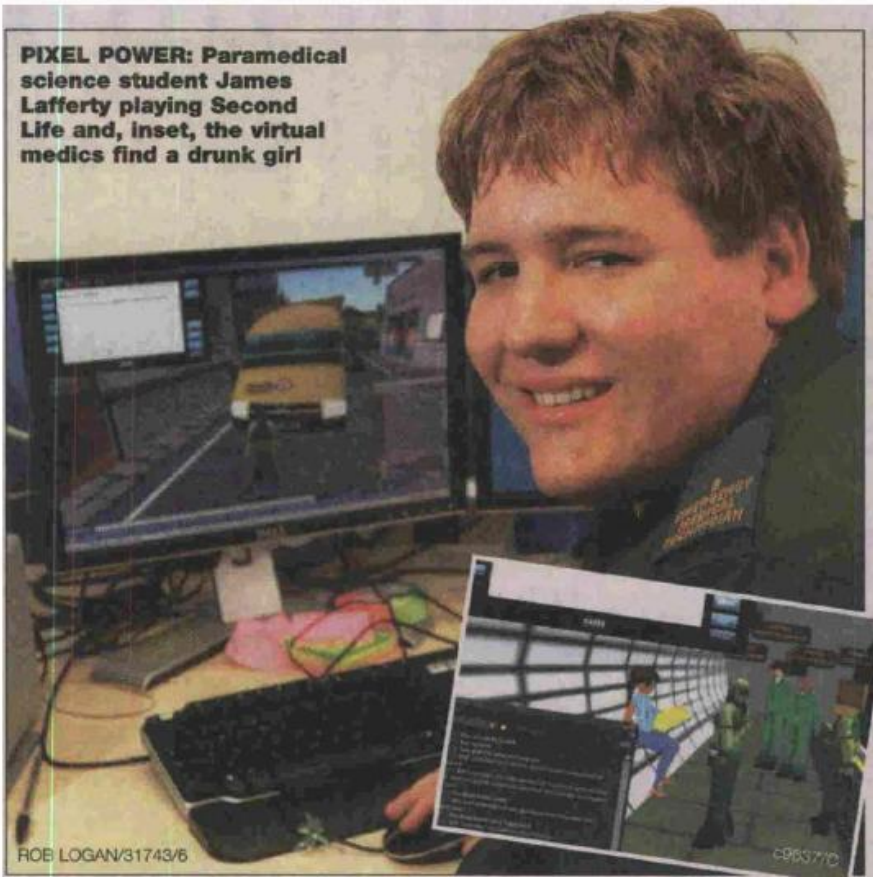
work placements, so it can be hard for the students to meet face-to-face.

"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 per week and work in groups of three or four to tend to the pixelated 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 it.

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PIXEL POWER: Paramedical science student James Lafferty playing Second Life and, inset, the virtual medics find a drunk girl

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