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App Embeds Education into Game Play

PITTSBURGH, March 5 - Striking a balance between education and entertainment was the goal as a team led by a [University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health](#) (GSPH) researcher created a social network game that incorporates the challenges surrounding organ donation and transplantation.

GSPH and the [Center for Organ Recovery & Education \(CORE\)](#) commissioned Pittsburgh-based gaming company [MogiMe Inc.](#) to develop [Doctor Transplant](#), a cross-platform social game that aims to spread the message about organ and tissue donation through the medium of online and mobile gaming. This resource-management game helps players realize the need for donated organs and learn about the scarcity of donors as they keep their virtual transplant hospital running smoothly, save digital patients' lives and play mini-games.

"While we worked very hard to embed important educational information into the game, we aimed to strike a balance between creating an educational game and an entertaining game," said [Howard B. Degenholtz](#), Ph.D., principal investigator of the project and associate professor of health policy and management at GSPH. "On one hand, if the game is not educational, we wouldn't meet our original objective to deliver a message and encourage players to take action and become a donor. On the other hand, if the game is not entertaining, players won't return and retain all the educational gains of the game."

Doctor Transplant will be available as a free download in the Apple App Store for iOS devices in April. A Facebook version of the game will be available May. Degenholtz and his collaborators will unveil a trailer for the game (available at www.YouTube.com/DoctorTransplant) March 7-9 at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco.

More than 112,000 people in the United States are currently awaiting organ transplant and about 19 people die every day while waiting for an organ. About 12,000 people who would be medically suitable to donate organs die every year, but only 8,000 of them actually donate. One organ donor can save up to eight lives with transplant organs and improve the quality of life for up to 50 people with donated tissues.

"We're always looking for new ways to reach people, informing them of the real need for organ donors, debunking persistent myths and encouraging them to join an organ donor registry," said Helen Bollinger, M.P.A., the grants and government liaison for CORE. "The Doctor Transplant game play incorporates many real-life challenges and players are able to see the number of lives that can be saved through organ donation."

The educational component of the game isn't immediately apparent - but that was by design. For example, once players advance to their virtual operating room, it will take them just one hour to secure a kidney to transplant, while it will take them 48 hours to secure a heart for transplant. This element of the game play demonstrates not only the scarcity of organs but also availability of certain organs.

In 2011, 15,418 people received kidney transplants from living and deceased donors, according to [Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network](#) data. That year, 2,151 people received heart transplants.

“Our aim is to create a social game that appeals not just to gamers, but also iOS and Facebook users, in general. And so designing a game around a popular genre that combines social game mechanics and organ donation and transplant awareness was our ultimate goal,” said Geraldine Yong, chief executive officer of MogiMe Inc. “We are honored to be one of the first to develop a social game that is fun and yet meaningful.”

Tackling the subject matter with sensitivity and empathy was the top priority for Bollinger, Degenholtz and their collaborators; no detail was insignificant. For example, game play requires players to seek donations from their Facebook friends and the game refers to organs as gifts.

[The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration](#) funded the game-development project through a two-year, \$697,017 grant (#D71HS19217). Specifically, this project was supported with a grant through HRSA’s Healthcare Systems Bureau, Division of Transplantation. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Division of Transplantation, Health Resources and Services Administration or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Collaborators on this project include project director Abby L. Resnick, M.A., and Misty Enos, R.N., associate director of community outreach for CORE.

CORE is one of 58 federally designated agencies in the United States known as a not-for-profit organ procurement organization. It serves Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Chemung County, New York and works with 155 hospitals in its designated service area. CORE plays a pivotal role between potential donors and patients awaiting transplantation. In addition to talking with families about the opportunity to donate, CORE coordinates the surgical recovery of organs, tissue and corneas, as well as the computerized matching of donated organs and placement of corneas. For more information about CORE, visit www.core.org.

MogiMe Inc., formerly LeftRight Studios, is a developer and publisher of first-party and third-party games. LeftRight Studios has developed games for some of the biggest names in the toys, entertainment and gaming industry. MogiMe is a cross-platform social gaming network that allows users to have fun and socialize on iOS, Android and on the web, where users can customize their avatars and play games with friends wherever and whenever. For more information about MogiMe, visit www.mogime.com.

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About GSPH

The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH), founded in 1948 and now one of the top-ranked schools of public health in the United States, conducts research on public health and medical care that improves the lives of millions of people around the world. GSPH is a leader in devising new methods to prevent and treat cardiovascular diseases, HIV/AIDS, cancer and other important public health problems. For more information about GSPH, visit the school’s Web site at <http://www.publichealth.pitt.edu>.

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