Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy to Benefit Those Who Stutter

Gareth Walkom, who stammers himself, is currently researching and developing virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) to benefit those who stammer, while doing his masters in Medical Product Design at Nottingham Trent University.

VRET is one of the most effective and safe methods of exposure therapy to date, and I believe that combining VRET with methods to benefit those who stammer, presents a unique and new effective method of therapy.

As part of my undergraduate degree in Digital Media Technology, I constructed and tested a VRET device specifically aimed at people who stammer. It slowly introduces them into a lecture theatre environment, where they are to give a talk to an animated audience on a particular topic. The talk lasts for 5 minutes and results are gathered throughout the VRET regarding the participant’s level of anxiety, body temperature, and electrodermal activity (measurement of sweat). Comments related to the participant’s speech are also noted.

The animated audience and lecture theatre have been designed to be as realistic as possible, allowing the participant to relate it to a real-life situation. Even though the VRET is still in early development, it has high potential in playing a significant part in therapy for those who stammer.