January 23, 2018

Doctor develops video game to teach teens about sexual health
By unews

Story highlights
• My Future Family video game teaches teens about sexual development and reproductive health.
• Tool may help young people plan their lives better by providing family-planning information.

Teenagers receive a lot of misinformation, or sometimes no information, about their sexual development and reproductive health. This is especially true in certain areas of India where parent-child conversations on sex are often still taboo.

To address this issue, Aparna Sridhar, MD, MPH, UCLA OB/GYN, partnered with Elena Bertozzi, PhD, associate professor of game development and design at Quinnipiac University, to create a video game that provides information about sexual reproduction and family planning.

“As a teenager growing up in India, I was told very little about puberty and sex,” says Dr. Sridhar. “Using technology to improve this communication seemed fitting since teens love their devices.”
The video game, called My Future Family, covers five distinct milestones in an adolescent’s life: puberty, schooling, dating, marriage and parenthood. The game walks teens through each milestone and asks questions about who might influence their decisions and the ages corresponding with different milestones.

Players create their ideal virtual family by selecting the number of children they expect to have and how many years apart the children will be. The game then challenges teens to identify resources they would need to create their desired family, including family planning measures. “Our original plan was to focus on contraception, but after conducting focus groups with parents and teens in India, we discovered that many adolescents lacked a basic understanding of male and female physiology, and the sexual reproduction process,” says Dr. Sridhar.

In August 2017, Dr. Sridhar traveled to Karnataka, India, where approximately 375 teen students played the game. “All of the participants wanted their friends to play and some even wanted their parents to play!” says Dr. Sridhar, who hopes to make the game available to teens in the U.S. and other countries. “Unfortunately, I see many teens and young adults at my practice who have received inaccurate information from the internet,” she says. Funding for the video game came from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Grand Challenges Explorations initiative. Drs. Sridhar and Bertozzi are seeking additional funding to further develop the game and provide more in-depth contraception information.