

## RESEÑA

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15198/seeci.2017.44.171-172>

### **SERIOUS GAMES FOR HEALTH. IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH BY PLAYING**

**Yuri Quintana and Oscar García**  
**Gedisa Publishing House, Barcelona, 2017**

**Graciela Padilla Castillo:** Complutense University of Madrid. Spain.  
gracielp@ucm.es

As it appears in the introduction of this paper, the content of this text is the result of the first course Serious Games for Health given in Spain in April, 2016, in Barcelona City. It is an academic initiative of the School of New Interactive Technologies (ENTI-UB), an institution attached to the University of Barcelona, Harvard Medical School and Division of Clinical Informatics at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Now, thanks to the publication of the book by Gedisa Publishing House, any academician, professional or scholar of communication-health-video games, can enter the health-applied games, thanks to this interesting and novel reading.

Throughout six chapters, which the authors call "capsules", ingeniously, we cover the importance of games, health trends and their connection to games, the typologies and problems of health-applied games, the impact of applied games, and the market of games with a decalogue of recommendations. Those who are not experts in the subject can find suggestive definitions in the first episode: "A serious game is an applied game, that is to say, that besides entertainment it entails learning. Sometimes, in ludication contexts, it also involves behavioral changes "(page 13) or" Through serious games for health, we not only want to increase knowledge but also conduct a sustained change of behavior over time" (page 13). After that, Quintana and Garcia say that they are serious games "because they must have goals to be achieved: educate and motivate. They should cause changes of knowledge and attitude, but also changes of behavior (eg weight loss, quitting smoking)" (page 14).

In the second capsule, they cite Jesse Schell, an American video game designer, author, executive director of Schell Games and a distinguished professor of the practical subject of Entertainment Technology at the Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). The authors state: "Schell says that, when we play, just like when we work, we solve challenges. Therefore, it is an activity with a very clear competence burden, but it is important to remember that we do it from a radically different perspective: we do it from a ludic attitude!" (Page 20).

After this inescapable and precise introduction, the work acquires a more practical component, with real examples and experiences of health-applied games. Quintana and Garcia say that games must have a motivational design, a component of ludication and all kinds of superheroes. They remember the importance of humor and how clowns and humor professionals "are very intelligent people because they are great artists of persuasion" (page 45). As a paradigm, they go deeper into the

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creation of Super Mario, in 1985, and they go on until today, with SpongeBob and his friend Patricio. The goal is to attract the public, create games and applications that improve the health and mood of patients, chronic patients, but also, society in general.

In fact, one of the vital parts of the book is found in the fifth capsule or chapter, where the authors address the current major health problems: aging populations, care expenses, numbers of chronic patients, alcohol, glucose, cholesterol, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, overweight, unhealthy diets ... Games and applications can prevent and reduce deaths and illnesses that are a consequence of these ailments and circumstances of the 21st century. Also, in order to validate these ideas, they cite the Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has worked the relationship between creativity and human happiness, as a psychology professor at the University of Claremont (California).

Finally, they analyze and consider some cases of success: Hubhub (a platform to promote health and well-being among the employees of a company; it includes a 24-hour plan seven days a week through goals, incentives and rewards); Mango Health (it develops applications that help people take their medication properly); Kognito (it has worked on suicide prevention and motivation-related issues); Diab (used for the treatment of diabetes); Re-Mission (online games for young patients with cancer); and Cohero Health (it helps pediatric patients with respiratory medication), among others.

This review is a good example of the interest, originality and relevance of this book, which is truly recommended and necessary. The curriculum of its authors also supports its strength. Yuri Quintana is Director of Global Health Informatics at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and an assistant medicine professor at Harvard. Óscar García is Academic Director of the first Degree in Video Games and Applied Games in Barcelona (ENTI-UB) and he has received the Silver Award in the Cure4Kids Global eHealth Challenge.

**Graciela Padilla Castillo**