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Virtual, Augmented and Mixed Reality, trendy gimmicks or essential resources in future medical libraries?

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The development of mobile access to medical information and clinical support tools has changed the landscape of medical education, evidence-based practice and point-of-care treatment. In medical libraries this is reflected in growing collections of mobile apps, 3D anatomy atlases and dissection tools, blended learning resources etc.

The latest trend in this area is medical learning and clinical resources available through Virtual, Augmented and Mixed Reality (VR, AR and MR) technology. The availability of headsets and mobile applications similar to the ones used for recreational gaming has made this new interactive technology very popular specifically among students.

Medical libraries worldwide have taken the lead in introducing these new technologies by providing online access to software and databases adapted to VR, AR and MR environments. Some libraries have also developed physical VR/MR labs as a part of their services. The question is what role VR, AR and MR will have in libraries in the future? Are they only trendy and fun gimmicks, helpful for promotion and user engagement, or will they contribute to re-shape how we look at medical libraries in the future?

VR, MR and AR technology has proven to enhance the quality of student and patient learning and has contributed to the development and safety of medical treatments. Recent studies identify medical libraries as the natural place for managing and enabling VR, MR and AR resources.

Medical librarians are experts in providing access to different types of e-resources and have technology skills and in-depth knowledge about learning and teaching support needs in medical education and clinical settings. Medical libraries are therefore encouraged to be prepared and be ready for an upcoming exciting change in regards to e-resource management.