

‘Virtual tutor’ soon for NTU medical students

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Students at the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine may soon be assisted by a “virtual tutor” that can adapt learning to each individual, said Nanyang Technological University (NTU) yesterday.

This comes as NTU announced its collaboration with technology firm IBM to develop the proof-of-concept “tutor” for medical students.

It aims to start a pilot next year, and this is only possible for the Lee Kong Chian School at the moment due to its extensively digitalised curriculum. The “virtual tutor” could be in the form of a mobile app or computer program with voice command, or be integrated with the school’s team-based learning platform.

It should also be able to adapt learning to each individual, analyse a student’s performance as well as his weaknesses and strengths, and help him in areas where he needs it.

For example, when a student wants to recall content on a specific topic, the “tutor” should be able to retrieve the relevant content, helping to identify key information and deepening his or her application of the knowledge, said NTU. The technology will access only the students’ anonymised data, it added.

The project is to complement other hands-on learning experiences that medical students have in science and anatomy practicals and supervised interactions with patients in hospitals and clinics here, said NTU.

“Artificial intelligence and deep learning technologies will enable NTU to provide its medical students with a highly customised learning experience,” said Professor Kam Chan Hin, NTU’s deputy provost of education.

He added: “This is an important milestone in NTU’s move in the last few years towards technology-enhanced learning, which uses multimedia components such as 2D or 3D animations, simulations, and augmented and virtual reality.”

Other universities here are turning to technology for a more personalised education experience as well.

Associate Professor Tan Swee Liang, director of the Singapore Management University’s centre for teaching excellence, said faculty members and instructors are encouraged to use technology to tailor education to students’ needs, preferences, specific interests and rates of progress.

A recent initiative, she said, used a platform that could decide what quiz content to offer students, based on their responses to the previous quiz, as well as the knowledge confidence level they indicated. The quizzes were used to gauge their level of comprehension in an economics class.