From video gamer to surgery ace? It could happen, study suggests

Research -- led by a doctor who plays -- says surgeons who score high on 'Super Monkey Ball 2' also do best on occupational tests.

By Denise Gellene, Times Staff Writer
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Worried that kids spend too much time playing video games? Take heart: They may become great surgeons.

New research released Monday found that surgeons with the highest scores on "Super Monkey Ball 2," "Star Wars Racer Revenge" and "Silent Scope" performed best on tests of suturing and laparoscopic surgery.

Doctors who reported having played video games at least three hours a week sometime in their past worked 27% faster and made 37% fewer errors on the surgical tasks compared with those who had never picked up a game controller, according to the study in the Archives of Surgery.

"For as little as three hours a week, you could help your children become the cyber-surgeons of the 21st century," said the study's lead author, Dr. James C. Rosser Jr. of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York.

The research looked at 33 surgeons attending a course on laparoscopic surgery and found that their game-playing skill was a better predictor of success on the surgical tests than years of medical practice or number of surgeries performed.

Expertise with "Super Monkey Ball 2," which involves steering a ball containing a monkey down a serpentine track while simultaneously targeting bananas, was most closely linked with high test scores.

Dr. Myriam J. Curet, a Stanford University surgeon who wrote an accompanying critique, cautioned against uncontrolled video game play, which has also been linked with aggressive behavior and bad grades.

The study authors agreed, saying that "indiscriminate video game play is not a panacea."

Properly channeled, play can foster the hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills needed by laparoscopic surgeons, who rely on television monitors to guide them during surgery, Rosser said.

He plays video games five to six hours a week.

* "Where did you go to school? Did you pass your boards?" ... Patients may also ask their doctors, 'Are you a Super Monkey Ball player?' " he said.

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