

Video game helps young people blast cancer

Sun Apr 2, 2006 5:34 PM BST

By Lisa Baertlein

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Saif Azar, a 14-year-old video game fan, said a new title called "Re-Mission" helped arm him with the knowledge of how to fight cancer after he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2003.

"It was perfect, actually. It helped me understand the things that were going on in my body," said Azar, who started playing the game as part of a clinical study and continues playing today as he wraps up his treatments.

Roxxi, the main character in "Re-Mission," is a gutsy, fully-armed "Nanobot" who seeks out and destroys cancer cells throughout the body.

HopeLab, the game's maker, said the results from its scientific study involving 375 teen and young adults at 34 medical centers in the United States, Canada and Australia showed that young people who played "Re-Mission" were more likely to stick to their medication regimens than those who did not.

Palo Alto, California-base HopeLab is a nonprofit organization that helps young people deal with chronic illnesses. It was founded in 2001 by board chair Pamela Omidyar, wife of eBay Inc. <EBAY.O> founder and Chairman Pierre Omidyar.

The results showed that the game helped players feel empowered to confront the challenge posed by their illness, which made them more likely to take their medicine -- and more likely to get better, said HopeLab President Pat Christen.

"We approached the study in the same way and with the same rigor that we would with a new drug," she said.

HopeLab targeted teens and young adults because their health outcomes tend not to be as good as younger and older groups, she said.

"There is an assumption that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing and they're not monitored as closely," Christen said.

The PC game is immediately available, free of charge, to teens and young people diagnosed with cancer. It will be widely available on May 1 for a suggested donation of \$20.