



# Using Standardized Patients to Augment Faculty in a Medical Interviewing Course

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## Introduction

- A common theme in medical school curricula is difficulty in recruiting talented faculty for participation in time-intensive courses such as those on patient / doctor communication
- Standardized patients are often asked to reach their greatest capabilities as high fidelity simulators but are not often asked to serve in an instructor role
- Understanding the extent to which SPs could be effective in the facilitation of communication courses is the first step in defining an approach for using experienced standardized patients to serve in the role of facilitators to support existing faculty

## Purpose

- This project aimed to define the utility of standardized patients as facilitators in the setting of a Medical Interviewing course

## Methods

### Course Structure

- 2<sup>nd</sup> year required Advanced Medical Interviewing course
- 4 sessions, four hours once per week
- Cases based on patient care and communications situations previously encountered by students and residents
- Class sessions comprised of two segments:
  - ½ session dedicated to interviewing one patient with a faculty facilitator
  - Alternate ½ session involved interviewing two shorter, barrier-driven patients, with a senior SP serving as the communications facilitator / instructor and a second SP portraying the case.
    - Designed to accommodate shorter time constraints and narrower content goals

## Methods

### SP Training Program

- Senior, experienced SPs were identified as potential facilitators
- Facilitator SPs participated in four to eight hours of focused training based on the Primary Teaching Method (PTM) developed by the course directors
  - Training included home study using a PTM lesson on DVD
  - Faculty facilitators were also trained in use of the PTM
- SP facilitators were assigned to guide the short barrier driven cases
- The training materials for both SP and SP facilitators included a unique script of in-depth teaching points
- These facilitator “cheat sheets” represent a change from our usual practice of relying on faculty experience and training to individualize feedback and information given during class
  - Aimed at achieving a high degree of uniformity across rooms, regardless of the skill level of the instructor

### Course and Instructor Evaluation

- The final course evaluation included paired questions that probed for students’ perceptions about the contributions of faculty and SP facilitators to the learning experience:
  - What was the contribution of course components to the practice, mastery and understanding of patient Interviewing?
    - SP Short Sessions with SP facilitators
    - SP Long Sessions with faculty facilitators
  - Rate Teaching Effectiveness:
    - Faculty who served as facilitators were effective
    - SPs who served as facilitators were effective

## Results

- Population: 146 students
- 85 (58%) completed course evaluations

Contribution of course components to the practice, mastery and understanding of patient interviewing	Mean	sd
Long Cases with Faculty Facilitators	3.4	.69
Short Cases with SP Facilitators	3.1	.65

P<0.0001

Teaching Effectiveness	Mean	sd
Faculty Facilitators	4.3	.91
SP Facilitators	3.6	1.05

P<0.0001

Overall Course Quality vs. SP Fac.	Mean	sd
Overall Course Quality	3.8	1.06
Teaching Effectiveness of SP Facilitators	3.6	1.05

P = not significant

### Key themes from student comments included:

- High quality of SP encounters and faculty instruction
- Preference for faculty over SPs as facilitators for feedback and assessment (18% among 50 negative comments)
- SPs not able to offer the same degree of practical pointers on how to handle difficult situations

### Additional Feedback

- Students demonstrated a high degree of respect to SPs as facilitators in this course
- The SPs in both the facilitator and patient roles have expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the experience
- Other SPs aspire to be chosen as a facilitator; it was viewed an honor to be designated for this role

## Discussion

- There was a small but noteworthy difference in how students rated the teaching effectiveness of SP facilitators, compared to faculty, which met our pre-course expectations for how students would react to SPs as facilitators
- UPSOM students have tremendous direct contact with faculty throughout the curriculum, and have previously expressed preferences for having only faculty (and not fellows, residents or any other instructors in general), so a difference in preference was expected
  - This observation also has common sense appeal – our valued, experienced and specifically trained faculty should receive higher teaching evaluations than non-faculty with 4-8 hours of instruction and no patient care experience
- Though SP facilitators were rated lower than faculty, the SP facilitators were not rated significantly lower than the overall course

## Conclusions

- With goal oriented coaching, experienced standardized patients can be brought up to speed as communications course facilitators in a relatively short time
- Standardized patients serving in the facilitator role can effectively support and augment faculty in interpersonal communication teaching sessions
- Faculty are still preferred by students and are perceived to be better at facilitating learning about patient-doctor communication, especially when it comes to giving feedback, practical instruction, and performing assessment

### For Additional Information

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