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 facilitator 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

• 2nd 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 faculty or facilitator
  ➢ Alternate ½ session involved interviewing two shorter, barrier-driven patients, with a senior SP serving as the facilitator / instructor and a second SP portraying the case.
• Designed to accommodate shorter time constraints and narrower content goals

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

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<th>SD</th>
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<td>SP Facilitators</td>
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P = not significant

Overall Course Quality vs. SP Fac.

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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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