



MEDICAL EDUCATION
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Standardized patients make it real for nursing students

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Purpose: The essential aspect of the nursing process is to establish therapeutic relationships with clients through the use of an appropriate counseling approach. Collaboration between the School of Nursing and the Standardized Patient (SP) program at Memorial University of Newfoundland began in 2001 to provide a realistic opportunity for nursing students to interview a patient with a mental health issue. The goal of the interview is to assist the student to respond appropriately to situations requiring specific counseling skills. **Methods:** Nursing students interview standardized patients within the Nursing Concepts for Mental Health course. The patients manifest anxious, angry, or delusional behaviors. The interviews are 10 minutes, followed by five minutes for feedback from the SP. The interviews are videotaped and then analyzed by small groups in a seminar/lab format. The students' critique focuses on preconceptions or feelings before this interaction; how the mental health issue influenced behavior toward the patient; the rationale for different communication techniques and a critique of their effectiveness; and how communication theory principles impact the interaction. **Results:** Nursing students are often startled by the realism and intensity of the SP portrayals. One hundred percent of the students in 2011-2012 rated the SP portrayals as realistic. The experience was determined to be a valuable learning activity by 97% of the students. Over 90% percent of the students responded positively to the question "did this experience help prepare you for therapeutic nurse/client interactions in the clinical setting?" **Conclusions:** More than 550 students have participated in these SP encounters over a twelve-year period. The original cases have remained largely unchanged. Outlining clear objectives at the beginning led to this success. Students' comments speak for themselves: Great learning experience!: Overall nerve wracking, but good experience; Amazing experience. I wish we did more than one; This type of standardized patient experience should be used for all courses; The SPs were great. They didn't break character throughout the whole thing. Really realistic; The SPs were unreal!! So amazing and they do a fabulous job giving feedback.