



Partnering Nursing and Theater Students for a Dynamic Mutual Learning Experience



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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot project was to provide Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students with an opportunity to practice therapeutic communication and mental health (MH) nursing assessment with simulated patients while simultaneously providing undergraduate theater students with the opportunity to apply developing acting skills to the field of healthcare simulation.

Background

- BSN students encounter wide variations in clinical experiences in mental health clinical settings.
- Patient interactions may not be directly observed by faculty which provides little opportunity for feedback and guided reflection.
- Simulation-based learning experiences (SBLEs) can provide students with rich patient care opportunities that they may not have the chance to experience during clinical rotations.
- Human simulators (e.g., manikins) are commonly used to substitute for patients in SBLEs designed to train nursing students in various skills; however, they lack the ability to demonstrate facial expressions or body language, which are inherently important in communication and human interaction
- Standardized patients (SPs), actors who have been trained to manifest medical conditions, provide a more dynamic and realistic experience for students learning to interact with patients.
- Highly-trained SPs can be difficult and expensive to access.
- Theater students need opportunities to hone their developing acting skills and can view SP work as a viable income-generating activity post-graduation.

"The standardized patients were an amazing learning tool. It was a real privilege to have them."
BSN Student

"I truly enjoyed the standardized patient experience. It was one of the most helpful things we have done in nursing school thus far."
BSN Student

The SPs did a fantastic job in portraying a patient and made the experience very real.

Methods

TRAINING

Six theater students were trained by an SP educator who has expertise in best practice guidelines set forth by the Association for Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE). A two-hour training session was conducted in person and recorded for subsequent theater student recruits. Some theater students also shadowed professional SPs and/or observed SBLEs in the school of nursing and school of medicine.

SBLEs

Three simulation-based learning experiences (SBLEs) took place during BSN students' MH clinical practicum.

- Introductory Scenario:** Held on the first day of the MH clinical rotation. Demonstration of a patient encounter with an instructor in the role of nurse and an SP as a patient diagnosed with depression. The instructor modeled both effective and non-effective communication with the SP and led discussion with students after the scenario ended.
- Schizophrenia and Adverse Medication Reaction:** An SP portrayed a patient diagnosed with schizophrenia and displaying adverse effects of a medication. Students were required to assess the patient, identify symptoms, notify the patient's provider using the SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) framework, and administer an intramuscular (IM) injection of a medication to counter adverse symptoms. The IM injection was administered to the patient via an injection pad strapped to the SP's thigh.
- Alcohol Use Disorder/Withdrawal:** An SP portrayed a patient experiencing withdrawal from alcohol use. Students were required to utilize a nonjudgmental approach to build trust with the patient with the goal of convincing the patient to seek further treatment.

Following end of scenarios, SPs provided feedback directly to students on performance. Debriefing sessions took place immediately afterward.

"Working with the simulated patients was an amazing experience and helped me to feel more confident in my ability to communicate with patients in the clinical setting."
BSN Student

"This experience has been fantastic, and I would love to continue being a part of the program for the rest of my college experience. It is a chance to do what I love (acting) in a different, exciting way while helping others learn."
Theater Student SP

"It's really interesting to witness nurses being taught – I feel like it'll influence my future relationships with healthcare providers."
Theater Student SP

Data Collection

At the end of the semester, BSN students completed a questionnaire with focused statements about their experience and asked to rate those statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

BSN and theater students provided qualitative feedback by answering several open-ended questions.

Results

120 BSN students and 10 theater student SPs participated in the pilot.

In response to open-ended questions, BSN students reported:

- improved verbal communication and listening skills
- increased confidence and awareness of nonverbal communication

Theater students reported:

- an awareness of and improvement in their acting skills
- increased confidence
- being driven by a moral imperative to continue with this work.

Conclusions

Working with "live" patients, versus manikins, allowed BSN students to fully immerse themselves in the SBLEs. Theater students were introduced to a new field of acting with professional employment opportunities.

Challenges encountered included:

- Logistical management of schedules and students
- Variation in instructor background, preparation, and debriefing skills

A next step that has already been taken is the creation of a 1 credit hour course to train SPs, titled *Healthcare Simulation: Becoming an SP*, offered through the theater department; fifteen students have completed this course over three semesters.

Other future goals to continue to move this project forward are to design a study to formally measure nursing competencies for students participating in the MH SBLEs with SPs, to formalize and request human resource support to establish a process for hiring, training, and managing SPs, and to provide development for nursing faculty on the implementation of SBLEs and the work of SPs.

