The Effect of Standardized Patient Encounters on Undergraduate Nursing Student Empathy and Self-Efficacy in Therapeutic Communication

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Background
- Communication is vital in the exchange of information related to health promotion and education, prevention of illness, and treatment options (Kourkouta & Papathanasiou, 2014)
- Communication skills are taught in a largely didactic manner but are not refined until students enter the clinical arena (Lin et al., 2013)
- Standardized patient (SP) encounters offer students an opportunity to practice their skills in an environment free of clinical consequence (Lin et al., 2013)
- SP encounters have been shown to increase clinical knowledge and skill, improve diagnostic reasoning, and improve communication and interviewing skills (Lin et al., 2013)

PICOT
- In second-year undergraduate nursing students, how does a SP program compared to traditional educational methods influence empathy and self-efficacy related to therapeutic communication skills within one week?

Review of the Literature
- Key Terms: Standardized patient, standardized patient, patient simulation, programmed patient, patient actor, communication, interpersonal, nurse-patient relations
- Inclusion Criteria: English language, peer-reviewed or scholarly journals, January 2008-May 2015
- Exclusion Criteria: High-fidelity simulation, SP encounters as an assessment tool

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Synthesis of Evidence
- Levels of Evidence:
  - Level I: Meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) – 1 study
  - Level II: Single RCT – 5 studies
  - Level V: Systematic Review of qualitative studies – 2 studies
  - Level VI: Single qualitative study – 7 studies
- Appraisal of Evidence: JBI-MAStARI, CASP

Decision to Change Practice
- Improvements in communication and interpersonal skills were found to be central findings in the literature (Anderson et al., 2014; Bosse et al., 2012; Crofts et al., 2008; Eid et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013; Mckeenna et al., 2011; Mesquita et al., 2010; Miles et al., 2014; Owen & Ward-Smith, 2014; Rickles et al., 2009)
- Performance feedback by SPs, blinded evaluators, or instructors served as a valuable component of SP education (Anderson et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2013; Moulton et al., 2009)
- Use of peers as SPs can reduce cost, promote sustainability, and reinforce learned skills (Miles et al., 2014; Owen & Ward-Smith, 2014)

Outcomes
- Significant (p < 0.05) Improvements for Junior Group
  - I feel that I am able to put myself in a patient’s shoes while providing care
  - I believe that empathy is an important component of providing quality health care
  - I feel comfortable using silence during a conversation with a patient
  - I feel comfortable summarizing a conversation with a patient prior to closure of the conversation
  - I am aware of my body posture (open stance, uncrossed arms, etc.) during communication with a patient

- No significant Improvements for Sophomore Intervention Group

- Significant Improvements for Junior Group Compared to Sophomore Intervention Group
  - I feel that I am able to put myself in a patient’s shoes while providing care
  - I feel that I am able to understand my patient’s non-verbal cues and body language
  - I feel that lack of empathy would hinder my ability to provide quality care
  - I consider the understanding of non-verbal communication to be an important aspect of patient care
  - I feel comfortable summarizing a conversation with a patient prior to closure of the conversation

- Significant Improvements for Sophomore Intervention Group Compared to Sophomore Comparison Group
  - I feel that I am able to put myself in a patient’s shoes while providing care
  - I feel comfortable summarizing a conversation with a patient

- High learning satisfaction and positive qualitative feedback
  - "The learning experience allowed me to analyze my own behavior and actions"
  - "I am confident that the learning experience has helped me develop the skills necessary to be successful in the clinical setting"

Implementation
- Theoretical Framework: Patricia Benner’s From Novice to Expert Model
- EBP Framework: The ACE Star Model of EBP
- Sample: Sophomore Intervention Group (n = 19), Sophomore Comparison Group (n = 23), Junior Participant Group (n = 20)
- Setting: Midwestern private university; College of Nursing and Health Professions
- Design: Pre-test/post-test; Pilot intervention
- Intervention:
  - Sophomore-level students participated in a brief SP encounter aimed at improving empathy and self-efficacy related to therapeutic communication
  - Junior-level students acted as SPs
  - Feedback related to therapeutic communication skills was delivered following encounter
- Tools: Empathy and Self-Efficacy in Therapeutic Communication Scale; Learning Satisfaction and Learning Method Evaluation Scale
- Time: One week

Evaluation
- Primary Outcomes:
  - Feelings of empathy and self-efficacy in three samples independently (Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Rank test)
  - Comparison of Sophomore Intervention and Comparison Groups (Mann-Whitney U test)
  - Comparison of Sophomore Intervention and Junior Participant Groups (Mann-Whitney U test)
- Secondary Outcomes:
  - Learning satisfaction of all participants

Conclusion and Recommendations
- SP intervention demonstrated a positive impact on feelings of empathy and self-efficacy related to therapeutic communication, particularly for students acting as the SPs
- Feedback provided by SPs was particularly helpful to sophomore-level participants
- Students reported that they enjoyed and valued the experience
- Interaction with a SP offers students the opportunity to actively learn and reinforce therapeutic communication skills
- Improvements in student instructions and logistics are important to achieve optimal effectiveness of the intervention