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Featured Article

Nursing Simulation Research: What Are the Perceived Gaps?

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Background: There is a plethora of anecdotal and evidence-based literature on the topic of simulation. Researchers have studied simulation interventions, student perceptions and feelings, and learning outcomes of simulation; however, gaps still exist in what is known about the outcomes of simulation. The main purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the perceived gaps in simulation research. A secondary purpose was to identify areas of research saturation and areas of the science that need further evidence.

Methods: A convenience sample of registered nurses who are members of International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning was surveyed through the use of an Internet-based electronic questionnaire. Institutional review board approval was obtained, and consent was received. Study participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a research questionnaire with seven structured open-ended questions aimed at identifying: (a) areas of simulation have been well studied, (b) gaps in simulation research, and (c) what, other than funding, were seen as the obstacles to conducting research.

Results: From the structured open-ended questions, four categories were identified through content analysis of participant responses. These included: (a) outcomes, (b) simulation design/setting, (c) participants/facilitators, and (d) research rigor. Time, resources, and support were seen as the greatest obstacles to conducting research.

Conclusions: The need for more rigorous multisite studies and studies that focus on student and/or patient outcomes was identified as the greatest gap in simulation research. These findings from the clinicians, educators, simulation specialists, and researchers who are integral to advancing the science of simulation will enable future research related to advancing the state of the science of nursing simulation and possibly provide an opportunity for researchers with a similar research agenda to collaborate and conduct multisite studies. In addition, these findings informed the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning call for research funding this year and will continue to do so in the future.

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Simulation as a pedagogy for teaching and learning continues to grow throughout the academic and practice settings (Motola, Devine, Chung, Sullivan, & Issenberg,

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2013). With this growth in the utilization of simulation comes a need to provide the evidence to support its use. There is a plethora of research exploring various aspects of simulation; however, gaps in the science of simulation still exist (Yuan, Williams, Fang & Ye, 2012).

Key Points

- Multi-site, outcome-based rigorous studies are needed in nursing simulation.
- Satisfaction, perceptions, and self-efficacy in simulation are well-studied.
- Resources and support are identified as barriers to conducting simulation research.

Research studies earlier in this decade reported that both nurse educators and students found simulation to be a positive and beneficial learning experience (Kardong-Edgren, 2010; Waldner & Olson, 2007). As an example, Alinier, Hunt, Gordon, and Harwood (2006) and Cant and Cooper (2009) found that simulation experiences promote a student's ability to synthesize and apply knowledge. In addition, nursing students reported

increased confidence in the clinical setting and were satisfied with simulation as a teaching methodology (Blum, Borglund, & Parcells, 2010; Rourke, Schmidt, & Garga, 2010; Shinnick, Woo, & Mantes, 2011; Smith & Roehrs, 2009). Although these are important in establishing a solid foundation for simulation as a learning strategy, the development of the science in simulation is evolving beyond these measures. To further the evolution of the science of simulation, a summary of what is known and what is not known can guide future research.

Simulation is recognized as an effective teaching learning strategy in nursing education (Hayden, Smiley, Alexander, Kardong-Edgren, & Jeffries, 2014); however, gaps in the evidence still exist. The main purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to gain insight into advancing the science of simulation research beyond what is already known. This was achieved by trying to gain a better understanding of the perceived gaps in simulation research by identifying areas of research saturation and areas of the science that need further evidence. After institutional review board approval was obtained, all registered International Association of Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) members were invited by e-mail to take part in the study through the use of an Internet-based survey. The study was supported through the INACSL Research Committee.

Methods

This descriptive qualitative study used a naturalist inquiry approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was guided by the following two research questions: (a) what areas in simulation research do INACSL members perceive to be well

studied, and (b) what areas in simulation research do INACSL members perceive need more investigation. To accomplish this, an Internet-based survey was administered through e-mail because this modality offered the investigators the opportunity to access nurse educators and practitioners with an interest in simulation research (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2011). The study was conducted through the use of seven structured open-ended questions (Table 1) and a demographic survey using an Internet-based platform. The targeted pilot sample population was initially the INACSL Research Committee members (n = 50), followed by the general membership. The executive director (ED) of INACSL administered the demographic survey and the structured open-ended survey on behalf of the authors. Through the ED, participants were sent an initial introduction e-mail about the study and were informed that they would be receiving a follow-up e-mail invitation to participate in the study, including a link to the letter of explanation and a link to the study and demographic survey questions. Participant proceeded to the survey, it indicated consent to participate, and it took them to the study questions and demographic survey. The study was administered through the INACSL Internet-based survey platform at Constant Contact. The survey was anonymous and confidential; Constant Contact collated the responses on a secure server. A convenience sample of 50 members of the INACSL Research Committee was sent the e-mail survey as a pilot to ensure that there were no in the technology. Once the authors and ED confirmed that there were no technical issues the introductory e-mail was sent to the remainder of the INACSL membership (N = 1,811); this was followed by the invitation to participate in the study. All INACSL members were invited to participate; the sample for inclusion in the study was registered nurses of all educational backgrounds and levels who were members of INACSL. Participants were asked to complete the survey with seven open-ended questions aimed at identifying the gaps in the science of simulation. In addition, participants were asked to complete a brief

Table 1 Survey Questions

1. What areas of simulation have been well studied?
2. What are the gaps in simulation research?
3. What are the topics in simulation research that need to be expanded in terms of design and method?
4. What topics should be researched using qualitative methods?
5. What are the shortcomings/limitations noted in simulation research that are presented at conferences or in papers that should be addressed?
6. What are the needed conceptual/theoretical discussions that should occur to inform and advance the simulation research of the future?
7. What, other than funding, do you see as obstacles to conducting research?

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