



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Teaching and Learning in Nursing

journal homepage: www.jtln.org

Setting Learners up for Success: Presimulation and Prebriefing Strategies

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 9 March 2018

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Prebriefing

Briefing

Simulation-based learning

Orientation

Presimulation assignments

Ticket into simulation

ABSTRACT

Patient simulation is increasingly becoming an essential teaching and learning strategy in nursing education. An abundance of information has been written on enacting the scenario and in the debriefing process following the scenario. Less information can be found on the prebriefing (also known as *briefing*) phase of patient simulation. Prebriefing consists of all the activities prior to the start of the scenario, including presimulation assignments and prebriefing, and sets the stage for a successful simulation experience. Learning is enhanced, and debriefing improved with a quality prebriefing. This article will discuss the components of a superior prebriefing phase and provide practical suggestions for educators when designing presimulation assignments. A quality prebriefing will provide learners with the tools necessary for a successful simulation experience.

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The incorporation of patient simulation as a teaching–learning strategy has become an integral part of health care education. The International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation & Learning (INACSL) divides the simulation experience into three phases: prebriefing, scenario, and debriefing (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016). An abundance of information about the scenario and the debriefing phases can be found in the literature, but information about the prebriefing process is limited. Prebriefing encompasses preparatory activities occurring prior to the start of the simulation-based learning (SBL) experience. The purpose of the prebriefing is to set the stage for the scenario and assist learners in achieving the learning objectives. Prebriefing consists of the foundational events prior to the start of the scenario to orient learner and any presimulation assignments designed to prepare learners for the SBL experience. Preparatory activities in prebriefing should include a review of the learning objectives, patient situation, and an orientation to the equipment, environment, and manikin (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016; Lopreiato et al., 2016, pp. 5 & 27). Presimulation assignments are the learning activities the learner is expected to complete in advance of the simulation activity. This article will discuss the components of a quality prebriefing and review diverse options for presimulation assignments.

Literature Review

A literature search between the years 2006–2016 using Pubmed, MEDLINE Complete, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, Proquest Nursing and Allied Health Sources, and Science Direct Freedom Collection databases was conducted. The Society for Simulation in Healthcare and Clinical Simulation in Nursing journals were also used in the literature search. Keywords included briefing and simulation, prebriefing and simulation, presimulation, and prescenario. The search was limited to English language materials. Eleven articles on prebriefing were discovered.

The role of the prebriefing is more complex and critical to a successful simulated learning experience than the consideration given to it in the literature (Husebo, Friberg, Soreide, & Rystedt, 2012; Page-Cuttrara, 2014). Prebriefing is an essential component of SBL and crucial for a successful debriefing as it sets the stage for learning and reflection (McDermott, 2016). Gaps in the literature regarding the definition and purpose of prebriefing, alternate learning structures used in prebriefing, common terminology, and standardization of the process were identified (Chamberlain, 2015; Page-Cuttrara, 2014). Essential prebriefing activities identified were orientation, the purpose of the SBL, setting the tone, establishing the fiction contract, creating a psychologically safe environment for learning, and the logistics of the day (McDermott, 2016). The emerging literature on simulation prebriefing is bringing to light the importance of a strategically planned prebriefing phase of the SBL experience as the concept of prebriefing becomes more formalized. Prebriefing should be

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aimed at both engaging and orienting the learner, therefore enhancing satisfaction and participation (Chamberlain, 2015).

For the purposes of this article, *prebriefing* is defined as those preparatory activities that occur just prior to the scenario phase of the SBL, and *presimulation assignments* are those activities that are assigned to the learner for completion prior to the SBL experience. Some components of the prebriefing are essential and should be included in all SBL experiences, and other components, such as the presimulation assignments, can be very diverse and can vary greatly depending on the objectives and goals of the SBL and the level of the learner. The next section of this article will discuss components of prebriefing that are essential to all SBL experiences, and the following section will review assorted options for presimulation assignments. The last section of the article discusses details educators should take into consideration when developing the prebriefing phase of an SBL activity.

Essential Components of Prebriefing

Prebriefing activities are activities that occur the day of the SBL experience, prior to the start of the scenario. Scheduling adequate time for prebriefing is vital for a successful performance. The time required for completion of prebriefing activities will be determined by the level of the learner, the learner's prior experience with SBL, and the learning objectives. Essential components of prebriefing have been identified in the INACSL simulation standards and in the literature from simulation experts. These include discussing the detail and expectations of the simulation, providing necessary background information, orientation to the simulated environment, assignment of roles, in-simulation logistical details, and learner preparation time (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016).

Details and Expectations

Clarifying details and expectations is a crucial component of the prebriefing and includes logistical details, confidentiality, establishing a fiction contract, and creating a psychologically safe learning environment. By addressing details and expectations upfront, the learners are less likely to be distracted or worried and more inclined to focus on the learning activity at hand (Rudolph, Raemer, & Simon, 2014).

Addressing the issue of confidentiality in prebriefing is an important aspect in helping the learners to feel safe and be willing to take risks. When learners are asked to perform in an SBL event, they are often placed in psychologically vulnerable situations (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016). Establishing confidentiality expectations and professional boundaries will help the learner to feel safe and help ensure that the learning outcomes are not compromised. This pertains to the expectation that learners will not share details of the simulation with other learners, and it also pertains to the learner's confidentiality/privacy. If the SBL is to be recorded, learners should be notified in advance of the intent to record, the intent for use of the recording, the policy for retention and/or destruction of recordings, and an informed consent obtained. Learners should be advised of who will be observing and/or informed of the performance. Many simulation programs require learners and educators to sign a confidentiality agreement, which addresses many of these details prior to participation in an SBL event; nonetheless, expectations regarding confidentiality should always be reiterated during the prebriefing.

Although simulation educators strive to create a realistic simulated environment, there are limitations to realism. Establishing a fiction contract involves explaining to learners that, despite best efforts, there are some aspects of the simulated environment that will not be exactly like real life and will require some suspension of disbelief on

their part (Husebo et al., 2012; Rudolph et al., 2014). By establishing a fiction contract and acknowledging that not all aspects of the simulated environment are realistic can help learners to "buy into" the simulated situation (Rudolph et al., 2014).

Simulation creates a safe environment for the patient, but it is not always safe for the learner (Nielsen & Harder, 2013; Rudolph et al., 2014). Achieving an environment of psychological safety is essential for learning in simulation but not always an easy task. Rudolph et al. (2014) identified four potential situations where learner engagement with SBL can be threatened. These are as follows: (a) there is no "buy in" to the experience, (b) fidelity of the simulation is problematic, (c) simulation and debriefing threatens their professional identity, and (d) when learners develop defensive feelings when discussing less-than-perfect performance. Following simulation best practices and addressing the before-mentioned recommendations, attention to logistical detail, addressing confidentiality, and establishing a fiction contract help to foster a safe learning environment. Learners need to feel that they are respected, and their perspective is valued by the educator. Demonstrating a respect for the learner and an understanding of their perspective during prebriefing will infuse the debriefing phase with a positive psychological tone (Rudolph et al., 2014). Creating a psychologically safe environment during prebriefing will help learners to feel safe enough to fully engage in the simulated experience and take some interpersonal risks during the scenario and the debriefing phases.

Background Information

Other essential information, which should be revealed to the learners during the prebriefing, include the objectives of the SBL activity; the method of evaluation, including the intent for it to be formative versus summative; important patient information; and any other information pertinent to the scenario. Scenario objectives may be broad or narrow depending on the goals of the SBL. Keeping objectives broad will help to prevent divulging too much detail regarding the expected actions of the participant during scenario performance, especially when the SBL is intended to evaluate critical thinking and decision making. Participants need to be informed in advance if the purpose of the SBL is for formative or summative evaluation. If it is for summative evaluation, the participant should be informed of how they will be evaluated (rubrics, evaluation tools, etc.). The learner should be given any information regarding the patient or the scenario, which is pertinent for performance during the scenario. This type of information can be very diverse depending on the scenario; it might include factors like patient history, access to the patient's electronic medical record (EMR), or events leading up to the current situation.

Orientation to the Simulated Environment

An orientation for the learners should take place prior to the SBL experience (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016). The length of the orientation will vary depending on the complexity of the SBL experience, the level of the learner, and the familiarity the learners have with simulation and the simulated setting. Simulation experts recommend developing a script for orientation to ensure consistency and standardization when scenarios are repeated (INACSL Standards Committee, 2016; McDermott, 2016). See Appendix 0 for a sample prebriefing script. Orientation to the simulated environment should include, but not limited to, the simulated setting, the functions and limitations of manikins, standardized participants, equipment, and location of supplies. A hands-on orientation rather than a demonstration by a facilitator or technician will help the learner to better retain the knowledge for use during the scenario. The amount of time allotted to environmental orientation will be dictated by the learner's

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