



Featured Article

“SimWars”: A Multispecialty Simulation Competition to Improve Learning

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KEYWORDS

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nursing;
competition

Abstract: The unique characteristics of Millennial nursing students require nursing faculty to develop innovative teaching strategies. The use of simulation in nursing education is one innovative approach. Furthermore, team-based simulation training is increasingly being used in hospitals and universities to train interprofessional health care teams. This article describes an innovative simulation competition, called “SimWars,” developed by faculty in three nursing courses within a baccalaureate program: Nursing of Children, Nursing of the Childbearing Family, and Community Health, to foster team-based attitudes toward patient care.

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Background

Students currently enrolled in undergraduate nursing programs are part of the Millennial Generation, individuals born between 1980 and 2000. The unique characteristics of Millennial nursing students require nursing faculty to develop innovative teaching strategies. These students are often described as optimistic, assertive, creative, committed, multitasking, and cooperative team players (Johanson, 2012; Mangold, 2007), and they prefer entertainment, technology, experiential learning, and a focus on teamwork (McCurry & Martins, 2010). These students

also are accustomed to immediate feedback and desire positive reinforcement (McCurry & Martins, 2010). Experiential learning activities, such as simulation, promote reflection and development of reasoning skills in Millennial nursing students (Johanson, 2012).

Seminal works by Jeffries (2005) have demonstrated that simulation allows students to use technical and interpersonal skills in situations that replicate real-world nursing experiences in a cost-effective, efficient, and high-quality manner. The use of simulation in nursing education has become a standard practice for most baccalaureate nursing programs, and accrediting bodies continue to support innovative approaches to simulation (Hayden, Smiley, & Gross, 2014). Simulation is most effective when significant aspects of clinical situations are replicated, and students are allowed to

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practice in a realistic, safe environment (Blevins, 2014; Brewer, 2011). During clinical simulations, faculty should allow students to make independent decisions and witness firsthand the positive or negative results of those decisions.

Simulation typically occurs with small learner groups

behind closed doors where only the participants and instructors have access to the encounter. Although this environment may enable learners to feel more comfortable, the format has some limitations. In the case of simulation in the undergraduate nursing curriculum, peer observation enables students to learn from errors and valuable teaching points generated by a team within a scenario (Okuda, Godwin, Jacobson, Wang, & Weingart, 2014). Being observed by classmates and faculty creates some stress for students involved in the scenario. Recent research indicates learners may have improved knowledge retention in stressful situations (Demaria et al., 2010;

Fraser et al., 2012; Khacharem, Zoudji, Kalyuga, & Ripoll, 2013).

Team-based simulation is effective in training health care students and providers (Dagnone, Takhar, & Lacroix, 2012; Villamaria et al., 2008). By using an adult learning approach, team-based simulation offers participants context-dependent and experiential learning (Eppich, Howard, Vozenilek, & Curran, 2011). Effective teams work toward a goal, using shared knowledge and skills (Masiello, 2012). To stimulate team training, faculty in three undergraduate nursing courses developed an innovative simulation-based competition, “SimWars.” Annually, teams of senior nursing students compete in various aspects of patient care, and three teams advance to the final competition. During the final round, students compete in front of a large audience of classmates and invited faculty who evaluate performances and decide a winner. This 2-day simulation-based competition was designed to foster team-based attitudes toward patient care, allow students to learn in a controlled environment, and make learning with human–patient simulators and standardized patients a positive experience. Additionally, “SimWars” offers learning opportunities for those watching and evaluating, because they must observe and reflect on the decision-making and teamwork of competing groups (Okuda et al., 2014). A competition format in simulation

has previously been shown to be effective in building skills in team-based patient care while also being enjoyable for participants (Dagnone, Takhar, & Lacroix, 2012; May, & Cole, 2014; Okuda et al., 2014). In addition, it has also been suggested that the ideal learning environment balances the immersive learning of simulation participation with the insight and perspective gained from being an observer (Oblinger, 2006). “SimWars” was not developed as a high-stakes assessment that would prevent students from progressing in the program, and observers do not provide analysis of participants’ performance. Therefore, any potential stress that might result from being observed by more than course faculty could be alleviated.

Description of Innovation

Competition Design

Senior-level baccalaureate nursing programs’ students are enrolled simultaneously in the Nursing of Children, Nursing of the Childrearing Family, and Community Health nursing courses. Faculty of these courses implemented a semester approach to simulation to require students to compete against each other. Students were oriented to the simulation experience and then instructed to form teams of three members each for the competition. They chose a creative team name. They had four weeks from the time the teams were formed to prepare for the first round of competition.

Preparation

“SimWars” was conducted at the semester end. Therefore, students had all required content needed to compete successfully in any of three course scenarios and had prior experience with simulation. Theory content, clinical experiences, modules, study questions, and guest lecturers in the three separate courses provided information necessary for students to feel confident in the simulation competition. Students were told general information about the three possible scenarios in which they would be competing.

To prepare for the simulations, students researched each topic, reviewing pathophysiology, treatment, and nursing care for each possible scenario. Some extremely competitive teams took initiative to gain additional insight from hospice nurses, pediatric nurses and physicians, and labor and delivery nurses. As an incentive to encourage full student participation, winners from various course simulations would be awarded a bonus point on their final grades in that course. Course faculty provided a brief simulation demonstration video for students to visualize expectations in the simulation center.

The Competition

During the first day of competition, each course had a course-specific scenario setup in separate areas of the

Key Points

- “Sim Wars” was designed to foster team-based attitudes toward patient care and to allow students the opportunity to learn in a controlled environment.
- “Sim Wars” is an innovative teaching strategy that targets the unique characteristics of Millennial nursing students.
- A competition-based simulation experience can lead to improved clinical judgment and leadership skills, while building students’ self-confidence.

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