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Featured Article

The Promoting Excellence and Reflective Learning in Simulation (PEARLS) Approach to Health Care Debriefing: A Faculty Development Guide

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Abstract: The Promoting Excellence and Reflective Learning in Simulation (PEARLS) blended approach to debriefing encourages educators to purposefully merge various debriefing strategies to tailor discussion to learner needs and learning context. While debriefing is a key component to simulation-based education, few resources exist to promote implementation of specific debriefing approaches. In response to growing demands from simulation programs and facilitators wishing to teach the PEARLS approach to debriefing, we offer a collection of resources to serve as a faculty development guide for implementation of PEARLS. In this article, we discuss common pitfalls and associated solutions when using PEARLS to facilitate debriefings and offer a PEARLS debriefing checklist that can serve as a tool for providing peer feedback on debriefing performance.

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The growth of simulation as a key health care education modality has prompted the development of a number of different debriefing methods to meet various learning needs, along with research describing variations in debriefing design and delivery (Arafeh, Hansen, & Nichols, 2010; Cantrell, 2008; Cheng et al., 2014, 2013, 2016; Cheng, Palaganas, et al., 2015; Cheng, Rodgers, van der Jagt, Eppich, & O'Donnell, 2012; Decker et al., 2013;

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Dreifuerst, 2012; Eppich & Cheng, 2015b; Fanning & Gaba, 2007; Kolbe et al., 2013; Levett-Jones & Lapkin, 2014; Raemer et al., 2011; Rudolph, Simon, Rivard, Dufresne, & Raemer, 2007; Salas et al., 2008; Sawyer & Deering, 2013; Zigmont, Kappus, & Sudikoff, 2011). As a core element of the experiential learning process, debriefing provides learners opportunities to reflect on simulated clinical events and to identify and analyze (a) areas of strength and/or areas for improvement, (b) solutions to problems, and (c) applications to future clinical practice (Decker et al., 2013; Dismukes, Gaba, & Howard, 2006; Eppich & Cheng, 2015b; Rudolph, Simon, Dufresne, & Raemer, 2006; Rudolph, Simon, Raemer, & Eppich, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2007). While substantial work describes how effective debriefing facilitates learning (Cheng et al., 2014; Dreifuerst, 2009; Fanning & Gaba, 2007; Kolbe, Grande, & Spahn, 2015; Levett-Jones & Lapkin, 2014), a relative paucity of literature guides simulation educator faculty development in debriefing methodologies (Cheng, Grant, et al., 2015; Eppich & Cheng, 2015a, 2015b; Kessler, Cheng, & Mullan, 2015). Faculty development opportunities for debriefing include workshops at conferences, simulation educator courses, or more recently, advanced formal training in education (e.g., masters in simulation, masters in health professions education; Cheng, Grant, et al., 2015). While these are viable options for some, many programs do not have the resources to support facilitator training through methods involving costly travel or course fees. As a consequence, only a fraction of educators within some simulation programs have received formal training in debriefing, resulting in variable methods and/or quality of debriefing within individual programs.

Key Points

- Blending different debriefing strategies allows educators to tailor the discussion to learner needs and learning context.
- To teach PEARLS, facilitators must be aware of the common pitfalls, consequences, and associated solutions.
- The PEARLS debriefing checklist can be used to guide feedback on debriefing performance.

Standards of best practice for debriefing have been described by the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation, which highlight the importance of a structured framework for debriefing (Decker et al., 2013). Within a structured framework, various different strategies for debriefing exist and can be classified into three broad categories: (a) promoting learner self-assessment (Ahmed et al., 2013; Eppich & Cheng, 2015a, 2015b; Fanning & Gaba, 2007), (b) facilitating focused discussion to promote reflective learning (Cheng et al., 2012; Decker et al., 2013; Dreifuerst, 2012; Eppich & Cheng, 2015b; Kolbe et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2006, 2008, 2007), and (c) providing information in the form of directive feedback and/or focused teaching (Archer, 2010; Decker et al., 2013; Eppich & Cheng, 2015b; Eppich, Hunt, Duval-Arnould, Siddall, & Cheng, 2015; Hatala, Cook, Zendejas, Hamstra, & Brydges, 2014). Specific debriefing strategies within each of these three categories have relative benefits and shortcomings. In the Promoting Excellence And Reflective Learning in Simulation (PEARLS) blended debriefing approach, educators purposefully combine strategies for debriefing depending on learner type and expertise, learning objective(s), amount of time available, educator expertise, and other considerations that influence the effectiveness of specific debriefing strategies (Eppich & Cheng, 2015b). Although the PEARLS blended approach of debriefing has been described in the literature and taught at various workshops and courses around the world, individual simulation programs wishing to implement this method may lack resources or expertise to offer local simulation educator training in PEARLS.

In this article, we will refer to ''educator'' as those individuals who are learning how to apply PEARLS (i.e., the learner in a simulation educator course), and we use the term ''PEARLS facilitator'' for those individuals developing faculty within their program to apply the PEARLS approach (i.e., the facilitators in a simulation educator course). Our goal was to provide a comprehensive resource for simulation programs wishing to offer simulation educator training using the PEARLS blended debriefing approach. This article compliments the original PEARLS publication that describes the rationale and development of the PEARLS debriefing framework and accompanying debriefing script that serves as a practical cognitive aid (Eppich & Cheng, 2015b).

This faculty development guide has two parts. First, we provide a detailed phase-by-phase description of high-yield targets for faculty development, namely common pitfalls for each phase of the debriefing, potential impacts of less effective behaviors, and strategies to mitigate them. This article is a resource for facilitators teaching the PEARLS method in simulation educator courses. Second, we describe a checklist that facilitators can use as a faculty development tool to guide formative assessment of debriefing performance. Together, these resources represent a toolkit for simulation programs to teach and implement the PEARLS blended method of debriefing.

Applying the PEARLS Approach to Debriefing—Common Pitfalls and Solutions

Based on our collective experience teaching the PEARLS blended approach of debriefing in our own simulation programs and at dozens of conference workshops, we have identified common pitfalls within each phase of debriefing that have predictable and potentially undesirable