

Incorporating Standardized Patients Into an Interprofessional Oral-Systemic Health Practicum

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ABSTRACT

Poor oral health and dental disease are major public health problems that are, in many cases, directly or indirectly linked with chronic conditions. Interprofessional collaborative teams are a way to address this problem. In this study we describe the development of an interprofessional education and interprofessional collaborative practice endeavor utilizing standardized patients to teach and evaluate clinical competencies in oral-systemic health and interprofessional collaborative practice settings. This pilot project paired family nurse practitioner students with student dentists to enhance the education of both groups. Standardized patients provided a safe and supervised environment to provide performance feedback and formatively evaluate student performance.

Keywords: advanced practice nursing education, interprofessional collaborative practice, oral-systemic health, simulation, standardized patients

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Poor oral health and dental disease are major public health problems that are strongly associated with lifestyle, sociocultural, environmental, and health systems factors, which are directly and indirectly linked with chronic conditions such as diabetes mellitus (DM).¹ To address this problem, the Institute of Medicine recommends formation of interprofessional collaborative teams to improve oral-systemic risk assessment and screening, behavioral change counseling, and care coordination for patients in primary care or community settings.²

To address this need, the School of Nursing and the School of Dental Medicine joined forces to prepare master of science (MS) nurse practitioner and doctor of nursing practice (DNP) students and students of dental medicine (SDM) with enhanced oral-systemic and interprofessional collaborative practice (IPCP) competencies. Inherent in the development of this interprofessional education (IPE) endeavor was the use of standardized patients (SPs) to evaluate

clinical competencies in oral-systemic health as well as competencies in IPCP.

The purpose of the present study is to report on the results of this unique oral health practicum using SPs to assess student performance and videotaped encounters to evaluate IPCP competencies. We focus on nurse practitioner student performance. The dental data will be reported elsewhere.

BACKGROUND

Simulation using SPs provides a venue that focuses attention on helping students to develop appropriate clinical behaviors. SPs are individuals who have been carefully trained to present an illness or scenario in a realistic and consistent manner and to provide helpful feedback, written or verbal, to the learner.³

The use of SPs has been integrated into the education of physicians, nurses, and other health care providers. The literature has shown that SPs are an effective way to provide comparative learning

experiences for students in a safe and supervised environment as well as to provide detailed performance feedback.⁴⁻⁶ In nursing, SPs have been used effectively to train students in assessment skills, clinical competencies, and communication and interpersonal skills.⁷⁻¹⁰ SP encounters can be used to provide both formative and summative evaluations of students' performance.¹¹

SPs also provide a means to incorporate IPE into curriculums as well as serve as a means to teach and evaluate IPCP competencies. IPE is defined as occurring when 2 or more students learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes.¹² IPCP is defined as occurring when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, careers, and communities to deliver the highest quality of care.¹³

Although no studies have specifically addressed the use of SPs to foster and evaluate IPCP competencies, other forms of simulation in IPE have been reported in the literature. Many of those studies involve nursing and medical students. In general, findings support simulation as a means to foster IPCP. A recent study used an IPCP approach to develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive program for daily mouth care for 3 long-term care facilities. The team consisted of dentistry and dental hygiene, nursing, medicine, dietetics, and health promotion. The findings showed heightened awareness, support, and greater efficiency in optimizing oral care.¹⁴ In general, IPCP studies have shown increased acquisition of knowledge, enhanced communication and teamwork, improved role awareness, and improved skills in delegation and leadership.¹⁴⁻¹⁸ In an effort to increase awareness of oral-systemic health as well as IPCP, SPs were incorporated into the FNP curriculum to teach and evaluate these competencies.

Only a limited number of studies have addressed IPE between nursing and dental students.¹⁹ Recently, Haber and colleagues²⁰ described a successful 8-year IPE partnership between nurse practitioners (NPs) and the School of Dental Medicine at New York University. This IPE partnership was found to provide NPs and dental students with a better understanding and respect for each other's knowledge base and scope

of practice. They also learned to communicate more effectively and function as a team. To date, no study has addressed the use of SPs to educate and evaluate IPCP between advanced practice nursing and student dentists.

METHODS

Participants

This pilot project included 8 FNP, DNP, or MS nursing students. Although the United States Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant supporting this project is directed at producing DNP graduates with enhanced oral-systemic skills, MS students still in the pipeline were included in this pilot practicum. As part of their clinical practicum, students were required to complete a total of 70 hours in the School of Dental Medicine's Urgent Care, Comprehensive Care, and Screening clinics. After their clinical experience, these FNP students were required to participate in an oral-systemic SP IPCP experience used chiefly as a teaching mechanism and formative evaluation. This project was reviewed by the investigation review board of the social and behavioral sciences and exempt status was obtained. Because participation in the SP IPCP scenario was a clinical course requirement, consent was requested to allow the faculty to use the information obtained from the evaluation of this experience for research purposes. The dental clinical practicum and SP IPCP experience were preceded by a requirement that FNP students complete an 8-module "Smiles for Life" tutorial that focused on oral systemic health as well as attend an extensive orientation that described the purpose of the dental clinic practicum, oral pathology, oral exam concepts, infection control practices in the dental clinics, and the key concepts of IPCP.

Sixteen student dentists (fourth and second year), who had worked with the FNP students in the dental clinics, volunteered to participate in the SP IPCP experience. The senior dental student was paired with a second-year beginning student to model collaborative practices in learning to the second-year students. Because dental student participation in the SP experience was not a course requirement, this exercise was used chiefly as a teaching mechanism for oral-systemic health and IPCP. Consent was

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