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Short Communication

Online Simulation of a Root Cause Analysis for Graduate Health Administration Students

Holly Hampe, DSc, MHA, MRM, RN*

Program Director and Assistant Professor of Health Service Administration, School of Nursing and Health Sciences, Robert Morris University, Moon Township, PA

KEYWORDS

simulation;
root cause analysis;
sentinel event;
healthcare;
medical errors

Abstract: Despite increasing online learning popularity, this environment poses special challenges. Online teaching/learning lacks opportunities to teach interpersonal skills necessary for “real life” careers in healthcare administration. Connected synchronously, 14 graduate students including four registered nurses, all provided a role within the simulated root cause analysis team, were able to analyze a sentinel event followed by a debriefing that utilized the PEARLS methods and a submitted reflective assignment. These students expressed much satisfaction with this exercise, finding new insight and experience in this meaningful learning exercise.

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Background

According to the Babson Research Group (2011), a growing number of students are turning to an online learning environment for their higher education as opposed to the traditional face-to-face or hybrid format. Kentnor (2015) stated that online education is no longer a rising trend but is now part of mainstream education. Many students are attracted to online learning as the environment offers more flexibility with respect to students' personal scheduling needs compared with more traditional, face-to-face didactic pedagogical approaches. In response to this growing student

interest, more universities are viewing the online environment as a critical part of their institution's long-term education strategy. Online learning, as defined by Allen and Seaman (2011), is a model of teaching in which 80% or more of the course's content is delivered online with no face to face meetings. However, educational institutions are challenged to provide quality education similar to the traditional face-to-face programs.

Despite the increasing popularity of online learning, this environment poses a special challenge for professors. According to Professor Arsham (1995-2015), one of the biggest issues with online educational experiences is interactivity, both in its level and mode. According to the research, successful online educational programs need to include well-designed, documented, structured courses in order to help facilitate active student engagement (Kentnor, 2015). Online

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* Corresponding author: hampe@rmu.edu (H. Hampe).

students are engaged via a Web-based Management Learning System such as Blackboard (www.blackboard.com). The students' educational experience includes online discussion boards, reflective journaling, case studies, comprehensive exams, assignments, and a final project.

Key Points

- Non-clinical healthcare learning via simulation exercise.
- Simulation of key healthcare administration activity involving root cause analysis for sentinel event.
- Use of synchronous simulation learning to enhance on-line student education.

Most of this online learning is undertaken asynchronously with little, if any, direct, face-to-face interaction with other students or the course instructor. An effective online environment creates a virtual classroom environment that maximizes participation (Arsham, 1995-2015). This could mean to teach students interpersonal skills necessary for real-life careers, such as one in health care administration, that require direct, daily

interaction with people. In order to provide a worthwhile learning experience, it is essential to present online students with opportunities to relate learned material to real-life situations. In Fall 2015 Semester, health administration students at a small private college in a large eastern state have been exposed to "Day in the Life" interviews with top-level health care professionals. Interviews are made available to students in many courses in the undergraduate and graduate health administration program. The students are required to watch the interviews and submit answers to a set of corresponding questions as an assignment. Interviews received positive feedback from students, with many students reporting the assignments as a beneficial learning tool. As a result, additional opportunities to connect online students to real-life situations were explored.

Inspired by the extensive use of simulation within the nursing program, it was decided to explore the use of simulation for the health administration graduate students in their online environment. Simulation-based training presents vital opportunities for experiential learning, a vital facet of learning in medical and health-related education or any field where on-the-job errors can have life-or-death consequences. Because performed in a safe environment, the literature asserted simulation allowed students to demonstrate and practice skills for organizing and communicating materials without fear of failure. Despite the supposed benefits of simulation training, Rosen, Hunt, Pronovost, Federowicz, and Weaver (2012) noted there are limited simulation examples, including both tabletop management and human patient simulation sessions, involving senior health care leaders compared with other industry leaders commonly engaged in simulation. Still, continued research has produced evidence demonstrating the value of simulation, and such findings suggest this

powerful learning tool will be used with increasing frequency in the many fields of health care education, including managerial fields (Rosen et al., 2012). This article will explain the use of simulation in an online environment, the tools used to facilitate the learning, and the students' reaction to this opportunity. A postsimulation reflective paper will be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of this exercise through debriefing questions immediately following the exercise and reflective assignment questions to be answered within a week of the exercise.

Online Simulation Opportunity

To begin to explore the use of simulation in the online health administration program, a meeting with a simulation educator was arranged. In this initial meeting, it was discussed how to best incorporate simulation into a health care administration graduate course on quality management in health care. Because root cause analysis (RCA) for sentinel events was already included in this course, it was felt this exercise would lend itself nicely to simulation. After reading the course textbooks and participation in the Institution for Healthcare Improvement RCA modules, students had a basic understanding of the process to conduct an RCA. An online simulation exercise provided the opportunity to apply this learned information to a simulated "real-life" scenario. The following learning objectives were identified for the simulation exercise:

- Actively participate through an identified health care professional involved in the simulated sentinel medical event.
- Analyze the sentinel event through the use of Reason's Swiss Cheese Model (as cited in [Duke University School of Medicine, 2016](#)).
- Identify the opportunities for improvement to prevent the reoccurrence of the sentinel medical error.
- Reflect on lessons learned through the simulated activity that can be applied to future health care education and experience.

The Institutional Review Board at Robert Morris University was consulted and the research was deemed exempt because the learning experience was part of the course curriculum. Data collected regarding the effectiveness of this learning environment was considered to be part of the course evaluation as such the student comments would remain anonymous, informal, and spontaneous.

Synchronous Simulation Experience

Google Hangout was the platform used to synchronously connect the students online. In order to set up a meeting, there were several dates for the students to choose from. An

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