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## A Transformative Experience for Occupational Therapy Students in a Simulated Learning Environment

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# A Transformative Experience for Occupational Therapy Students in a Simulated Learning Environment

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## Background

- The ability of the occupational therapy students to integrate and apply academic knowledge during fieldwork has been a concern for the fieldwork educators and the students (Smits & Ferguson, 2000).
- In the past three years, a common theme arose from the exit focus interviews with the entry-level occupational therapy students at Dominican University of California: Inadequate preparation for the basic foundation skills in physical rehabilitation practices.

## Literature Review

- The Institute of Medicine report To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health Care System, recommends teaching institutions use simulation for teaching novice practitioners problem solving, and crisis management (Kohn, Corrigan, & Donaldson, 2000).
- In 2010, Benner called for a radical transformation in how nurses were educated, identifying simulation as an effective pedagogy (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010).
- Simulation allows health care practitioners to acquire the skills and valuable experience they need safely, in a variety of clinical settings, without putting patients at risk. (AHRQ, 2011)
- The seminal book Quality and Safety in Nursing: A Competency Approach to Improving Outcomes, devotes an entire chapter to the use of simulation in improving nursing education. (Sherwood & Barnsteiner, 2012).
- One form of simulation incorporates standardized patients as live actors, portraying patient situations. Students interact with standardized patients in order to better prepare for the complexities of clinical practice (Lindstrom-Hazel & West-Frasier, 2004), and thus transforming the learning experience from classroom to simulated clinical settings.

## Objective

Simulation is being integrated into nursing and medical curriculum nationally and it is well integrated into the Nursing program at Dominican University of California. However, use of simulation in allied health professionals is only an emerging practice. The aim of this program is to integrate simulation into the OT curriculum in order to facilitate the development of therapy foundation skill

## Methods

- Utilizing existing resources, a new skill lab curriculum was developed and introduced to the entry-level occupational therapy program.
- Five experiential labs, in a variety of simulated environments using both standardized patients and patient volunteers were part of this new curriculum.
- Five new standardized-patient scenarios that matches with common occupational therapy practice environments were developed by the faculty teaching in the physical rehabilitation program.
- Separate training sessions were conducted to train the standardized patients the specific of the physical disabilities presented in the cases.
- Standardized patients are asked to act out the specific movement limitation in the roles as authentic as possible. Diagrams were used in the script as part of the training with the standardized patients.



## Results

- Implementation of the new skill lab curriculum was carried out for the first time in Spring 2013.
- Twenty-one first-year occupational therapy students from our undergraduate program participated in ten practice labs and five experiential labs.
- During the practice labs, students were introduced to the standardized procedures of the basic physical assessments and patient's transfer skills.
- The five experiential labs integrated patients' specific characteristics and diagnosis in a variety of settings including outpatient therapy clinic, inpatient acute care and home health care.
- Continuous funding was secured to continue with the simulated labs in the occupational therapy program
- Twenty-four second-year occupational therapy students from the entry-level graduate program are currently enrolled in the skill lab in Fall 2013.



## Evidence of the project's impact

- An anonymous survey to students reveals some common themes in occupational therapy students' learning experience in a simulated environment: Client-centered, instant feedback and realism.
- The use of simulated environment, standardized patients and patient volunteers enhance occupational therapy students in foundation skills and clinical bedside manner development

## Quotes from students

*"I like the opportunity to learn in a simulated environment and put our skills to practice, as well as receive feedback"*

*"While objective feedback from the instructors was needed, hearing feedback from the "patient" felt especially important"*

*"I learn how it is like to be in a therapist role and how important it is to be client-centered"*

*"Skill lab helped me learn how to establish a rapport with patients and correctly administer assessments"*

*"The skill lab activities give me an opportunity to practice on a real person where I can make mistakes and be corrected"*

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