

A Standardized Patient Model to Empower Medical Students to Care for Patients with a Visible Disability



WAYNE STATE
School of Medicine

BACKGROUND

- Patients with disabilities experience many challenges in accessing health care, including a lack of properly trained providers.
- A lack of comfort between a physician and a patient with a disability could lead to a misdiagnosis, a breakdown in communication, decreased quality of care, and an increased possibility of a secondary health crisis.^{3,8}
- When medical students graduate, many feel that they have had little to no exposure to patients with disabilities.⁵ Some even feel anxiety when given the opportunity to care for a patient with a disability.⁸
- Some schools have used a variety of instructional modalities including lectures, discussion groups, and videos in order to fill the gap in students' knowledge about persons with disabilities.^{7,10}
- However, these interventions were seen to be not as effective as involving a direct patient perspective¹⁰ or an encounter with a patient with a disability.^{6,8,11}
- Unfortunately, students do not get many chances to interact with patients with disabilities.^{1,3,5} As a result, some schools have relied on standardized patients (SPs). SPs are useful tools to help students build upon their competencies and learn the correct approaches through simulated clinical scenarios.⁵
- However, the use of SPs to portray a patient with a visible disability is very limited.
- Integrating a SP curriculum that uses SPs with disabilities requires a lot of time and resources. Ensuring facilities are wheelchair-accessible, including exam rooms and bathrooms, is an important consideration.
- The time spent recruiting, selecting, and training SPs can also be demanding. An important point is that SPs must be able to separate themselves from their own stories to become the patient the medical student is working with.⁵
- Using medical students to portray SPs could be an effective alternate to help students become confident and capable working with patients with a visible disability.

METHODS

- A group of first year medical students will be provided the opportunity to participate in a workshop about caring for patients with a visible disability.
- A pre-survey will be distributed in person before the workshop to assess the students' knowledge and comfort in terms of interacting with patients with disabilities.
- The first part of the workshop will be a short information session with an "expert" (someone who has experience as a patient with a visible disability).
- They will provide information on best practices when working with patients with a visible disability. Disability history questions will also be discussed with the students.
- The second part of the workshop will be an SP scenario and the SP will have a visible disability (in a wheelchair).
 - SPs will be medical students that have been previously trained with the "expert" giving input and advice in order to portray a patient with a visible disability to the best of their ability.
- A post-survey will be given in person after the workshop to assess what the students learned as well as the effectiveness of the SP scenario.

Nikita Sathiaprakash BS, Sonal Patel MA, Jason Booza PhD
Wayne State University School of Medicine

ANALYSIS PLAN

- Pre-survey and post-survey will contain a mix Likert scale-type questions as well as narrative questions.
- Questions will be focused on a handful of aspects: communication, bias/stereotype, confidence, knowledge/competency, and effectiveness of workshop
- Mix of question type allows for a mixed approach where quantitative data can be gathered while also having anecdotal/reflective evidence about the effectiveness of the education intervention.
- The quantified results can be analyzed for trends in the different aspects.
- The qualitative data can be examined for emerging themes that are attributed to engaging with the SP scenario as well as what could be modified in the scenario to make it more effective.

LIMITATIONS

- The portrayal of a patient in a wheelchair cannot be genuine unless the SP has the experience of being in a wheelchair long term.
- Though medical students will be trained by an "expert", it should be known that the medical students will be given key things to convey and will not be conveying to workshop attendees that they completely understand the experience of a patient in a wheelchair.
- Thus, our SP scenario is not meant to replace the use of patients who have a disability as an SP or patient panels, but rather be an additional method for students to practice their skills.
- Due to the nature of being a pilot workshop and limited space, a small portion of the student body will be participating in the session. This could lead to the results not being fully representative of the whole student class, depending on which students decide they would like to participate in the workshop.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Physicians in every specialty work with patients who have disabilities.
- Medical students should be trained to confidently interact with and develop rapport with all patients, including those with disabilities.
- This workshop is projected to help medical students gain confidence and equip them to work with patients of any background- patients with a visible disability in particular.
- An SP scenario is a valuable method of training students to prepare them for future interactions.
- Using medical students, who have been trained under the guidance of a person with a visible disability, as standardized patients is projected to be an effective manner of training medical students in a simulated clinical scenario.

NEXT STEPS

- A post-survey given immediately after the workshop cannot convey whether students can apply what they have learned in the workshop in the future.
- This project would benefit from the addition of a longitudinal component where the students become a cohort and are periodically given surveys in future years.
- As the students move on to their clerkship years, their ability to work with patients with disabilities should be assessed to determine the long-term impact of the workshop.
- A need for follow-up workshops or more specialized workshops (ex. physical exam maneuvers) could be uncovered

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