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Early simulation as a tool to prepare doctor of physical therapy students for collaborative practice

Stewart E, Schmitt L and Hakim E.W.

Department of Physical Therapy, University of Delaware, USA

Many healthcare educational programs have increased the amount of simulated patient experiences offered to students. Evidence suggests that early, authentic patient experiences enhance learning. However, the appropriateness of allowing new learners to practice on “real” patients prior to obtainment of all required knowledge and skill has come into question. Greater emphasis has also been placed on the importance of inter-professional educational experiences as a means to achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s Triple Aim Initiative. To provide inter-professional opportunities for nursing and physical therapy students, a simulation activity was created to promote collaborative patient care. The case was designed with a degree of challenge appropriate to the educational level of the participating students. Portrayal of patients and caregivers by theatre students infused realism into the encounter and promoted a safe environment for identification and correction of errors prior to entering the “true” clinical environment where such consequences are magnified. Survey data from the 34 Doctor of Physical Therapy students who participated in 2013 revealed a strong and favorable response to the value of the learning experience. Mixed response in perceived confidence levels was received specific to patient interaction, collaboration with nursing, communication, and effective management of medical lines. These dichotomous results may reflect the increased confidence of those students who already possessed such skills and the uncertainty of those students naïve to inter-professional and direct patient care encounters. This cost-effective, safe, collaborative experience allowed early learners to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and behaviors that were discipline-specific and reflective of integrative practice.

Biography

Eric Stewart, PT, DPT is the Director of Clinical Education and also Assistant Professor at UD. He publishes and presents in clinical education, acute care, and cardiopulmonary PT.

esstewart@udel.edu