



Simulation overload: Reflections on the experience of being a simulated patient

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Introduction

A Simulated Patient is someone who has been trained to portray a patient with a specific condition in a realistic way. The experimental course, "Simulated Patient (SP) Practicum" was designed by Professor Buller to teach under-graduate students about mental health diagnoses. As part of the course, students learned to perform the role of a simulated patient for a class of graduate students studying to be counselors.

Simulated Patient Practicum Course Objectives

- 1) Students will demonstrate knowledge of DSM-5 Disorders through writing clinical cases
- 2) Students will interpret the clinical cases into detailed character scripts
- 3) Students will perform the physical and emotional role of the patient from the character scripts
- 4) Students will develop the skills to give constructive feedback to other students about their performance

Given the experimental nature of the course, it seemed appropriate to explore the effectiveness of the objectives at promoting learning. To achieve this exploratory task, the professor and her student set out on a collaborative mission to understand the experience of participating in the course, "Simulated Patient Practicum".



Dr. Liane Leedom (left) with Karlie Spader (right) participating in a simulated patient role-play experience, Gender Dysphoria Disorder.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to understand the experience of a student participating in the course "Simulated Patient Practicum".

The student reflected on her experience as a simulated patient for several different class assignments. Several themes emerged as meaningful to the experience:

1. Understanding client experiences
 - a. Being a student in the simulated patient class
 - b. Volunteering as a student-client
 - c. Personal therapy
2. Self discovery
3. Ambition



Professor, Allison Buller (right) giving feedback to students as part of the Simulated Patient Practicum class.

Reflective Questions

The following questions guided the reflective process in this project.

1. Describe the experience of participating as a simulated patient?
2. What experiences were meaningful to you as a simulated patient?

Steps Used in the Reflective Process

- Step 1. Reflect on personal statements from individual meetings with professor.
- Step 2. Write out reflective statements from individual meetings with professor
- Step 3. Read and re-read reflective statements.
- Step 4. Select text from the reflective statements for coding.
- Step 5. Place coded text in categories
- Step 6. Organize the collection of categories into clusters of themes
- Step 7. Create an individual description for each theme using verbatim examples.



Karlie Spader (left) participating as a student-client with Stephanie Vega (right) graduate student in Counseling

Description of the Student

The participant is an undergraduate student majoring in psychology at the University of Bridgeport (UB). She is a white, female, early twenties who resides primarily on campus. The student chose to reflect on the period of time between August 2015 and February, 2016. During that time the student took the course "Simulated Patient Practicum". While taking this course, she volunteered her time as a student-client. She enrolled in personal therapy and also applied and was accepted into the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

Conceptual Framework of Reflective Statements



Verbatim Examples from Reflective Statements

I didn't

"I didn't want to mess up."
"I needed to talk about hospice experience... I didn't burn myself out"

Myself

"I was hard on myself."
"I was doubting myself"
"I kept telling myself that I wasn't going to cry"
"Ready to judge myself"

Feelings

"I have my own feelings, I learned about feelings and turn around and helped others with their feelings"

Change

"What changed was my idea of counseling"
"I knew I had to change something"

Feedback

"Listening to the feedback was probably the best part"
"But listening to feedback of what you want to do with your life is cooler, if I wanted to be an actress, I would be interested in the role."
"I'm not only reflecting on myself... I'm also listening to the feedback that they give"

Techniques:

"Always so proud because I'm about to learn all these "Fun" techniques"

Proud:

"Proud of myself and the performance"

I knew:

"I knew what I had to say"
"I knew I had to face a fear"

Conclusion

"When I started this project 6 months ago, I didn't know the first step to self-discovery. There was a lot of self-doubt and I lacked faith in myself. I was searching for the confidence to change my life. As part of the Simulated Patient experience, I realized I was interested in exploring the role of a counselor. I listened to the feedback and techniques given by the professors during class. The feedback was the best part and it motivated me to volunteer as a student-client. The student-client role was similar to my role as a simulated patient in that they both allowed me to observe the counselor at work. With this new knowledge, I had the strength and courage to apply to graduate school in counseling. Once I was accepted into the program, I was so proud of myself; all that hard work paid off! I always knew I was ambitious, but I never knew my ambition would lead to success."

Association of Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE) retrieved May, 5 2015. <http://www.aspeeducators.org/node/48>

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