

Challenging communication simulation training: can we show it positively changes junior doctor behaviour and performance? Pilot feedback and future implications

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Introduction

Foundation doctors face unique challenges upon transition to their second year of training.

In NHS Lothian we surveyed 43 doctors who had recently completed Foundation Training, and conducted a follow-up focus group with FY2 doctors. We identified they felt ill-equipped for their increase in leadership responsibilities from FY1 to FY2, and specifically identified a learning need to deliver training on challenging communication scenarios.

We piloted a bespoke simulated communication skills workshop with very positive immediate post-course feedback. We wanted to evaluate the impact of this workshop after several months to investigate effects on participants behaviour and performance.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 of the original attendees, 3 – 6 months after completing the workshop.

Attendees were asked in particular about specific communication tools they had learned on the course, whether they felt the course had improved their clinical practice, and to provide specific examples of where they had used elements of the course in their current practice.

Acknowledgments

Both Chris O'Shea and Nathan Oliver attended the Effective Communication for Healthcare (EC4H) tutor training workshops, which were instrumental in influencing the course design. Further info at www.ec4h.org.uk



Simulation Method

(Top-left): Participants conduct a challenging interview with a simulated patient. Other attendees are behind a partition, observing the consultation on a screen. Two tutors facilitate, with one between the partition and room, the other controlling the screen. Either of the tutors, or the candidate, may stop the consultation at any time if the candidate requires further direction.

(Top-right): After pausing the consultation, the relevant portion of the interview is replayed.

(Bottom-right): Hypotheses are generated regarding the consultation and how the patient may be feeling, which the tutor can then present to the simulated patient (who remains in character).

(Bottom-left): Together with the tutor, a strategy as to how to best proceed is discussed. The interview then re-starts.

Results

100% of interviewed attendees reported the course definitely improved their performance in handling challenging communication scenarios. All would recommend the course to their colleagues.

Several communication methods learned on the course were consistently adopted by participants:

- Chunking and checking
- Use of summarising and clarifying questions
- Reflecting views back to the patient
- Use of compromise to achieve a satisfactory outcome

Trainees reported these techniques were particularly effective in discussion regarding end of life care, and breaking bad news. They found they were also spending less time having these difficult conversations as they felt more effective in performing them.

Implications

FY2 Trainees consistently reported this course positively changed their behaviour and confidence in handling challenging communication scenarios.

All FY2 doctors in Lothian will receive training in challenging communication scenarios over 2017 – 2018.

“Everyone would benefit from a course like this at least once in their foundation training.”

“There is no pressure and it is a safe space.”