The Impact of an Advance Care Planning Simulation on the Communication Skills of Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner Students: A Pilot Study at New York University College of Nursing (NYUCN)

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Background
• Decisions based upon a patient's and family's wishes, goals and values needs to be guided by clinicians equipped to engage in complex advance care planning (ACP) conversations.
• Given its importance, communication skill proficiency has been identified as a core competency for the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) in palliative care.
• Although simulation utilizing a standardized patient (SP) model has been employed for communication skills training in healthcare education, little is known about its usefulness in preparing palliative care nurse practitioner students for these challenging ACP discussions.

Methods
• A convenience sample (N = 19) of nurse practitioner students enrolled in the palliative care track at New York University's College of Nursing (NYUCN) was used for this one group pretest – posttest pilot study.
• Student participants were assigned to groups of three or four with a designated faculty member. They engaged in a standardized patient ACP discussion simulation with an actor playing the role of a newly diagnosed cancer patient.
• Once the last student completed the exercise, participants received feedback from the faculty member (based on the SPIKES protocol [Baile, Buckman, Lenzi, Beale, & Kudelka, 2000]), as well as from their peers and the standardized patient.
• The simulation was repeated seven weeks later, using the same format.
• Both encounters were videotaped, excluding the feedback portion of the exercise.
• Participants completed a demographics questionnaire and a 14 item self-confidence tool based on the work of Clayton et al. (2012) prior to the first and after the second simulation. An independent faculty member viewed the taped encounters and scored a 12 item SPIKES protocol based communication skills checklist for both simulations.
• Due to subject attrition and data loss, final statistical analysis included 9 paired communication skills checklists and 15 paired self-confidence tools.
• Level of statistical significance was set at p < .05.

Results
Demographics (N = 19)
- Age: 20 - 30: n = 13 (68%)
- 31 - 40: n = 4 (21%)
- 41 - 50: n = 2 (11%)
- Years of experience:
  - 1 - 3: n = 4 (21%)
  - 4 - 10: n = 14 (74%)
  - 11 - 20: n = 1 (5%)

Experience in discussing:
- Healthcare proxy:
  - Yes n = 13 (68%)
  - No n = 6 (32%)
- Code status:
  - Yes n = 13 (68%)
  - No n = 6 (32%)

Communication Skills
• Five participants (56%) demonstrated improvement while four (44%) experienced a decrease in communication skill total scores
• Paired t-test analysis determined no statistically significant difference in the communication skill checklist score totals; t(8) = - .098, p = .924
• Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis found no statistically significant differences for any of the individual communication skill items

Self-Confidence
• Fourteen participants (93%) experienced an increase in the pre-post simulation self-confidence tool total scores
• Paired t-test analysis determined a statistically significant increase in the overall total self-confidence scores post simulation #2; t(14) = 4.725, p < .001
• Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis found statistically significant increases in nine of the 14 tool items

Limitations
• Small sample size
• Loss of audio for videotaped simulation encounters
• Time allotted for simulation exercise completion
• Scheduling of simulation experiences
• Variation in actors employed for simulation two
• Adaptation of data collection tools
• Aggregate data reporting

Implications
These results may positively impact education, practice and health policy as evidenced by:
• Potential opportunities for study replication in other graduate nursing programs
• Changes in reimbursement for nurse practitioners engaged in ACP discussions with Medicare patients
• Introduction of the Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act in Congress

Conclusions
• Despite mixed results, repetition of an advance care planning simulation may be a valuable educational strategy for communication skill development in the palliative care nurse practitioner student population.
• The pilot study supports the need for additional research to explore simulation’s role in graduate nursing education.

Research Questions
1. Does the use of a standardized patient simulation improve nurse practitioner students’ communication skills surrounding advance care planning?
2. Does repetition of a standardized patient simulation experience positively impact the nurse practitioner students’ communication abilities?
3. Does the use of a repetitive standardized patient simulation improve nurse practitioner students’ confidence to engage in advance care planning conversations?