

Using Simulation to Develop Empathy

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view until you climb into his skin and walk around in it ~ Lee. 1960.

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In healthcare, empathy is considered a basic component of therapeutic relationships and a critical factor in patients' definitions of quality care. More than 200 studies have demonstrated the positive impact of empathic healthcare interactions on patient outcomes [1]. While it is reasonable to assume that most healthcare professionals have an empathic disposition, healthcare reports too often describe patient experiences that portray the antithesis of empathy - indifference, neglect, callousness, cruelty, and dehumanization [2]. Further, healthcare professionals who practice without empathy are themselves at risk of depression, burnout and attrition.

To address these concerns, a range of educational initiatives have been implemented. Among these, a growing body of evidence suggests that experiential simulations where learners are asked to literally stand in the patient's shoes appear to be the most effective approach for teaching empathy [3]. These 'point-of-view' simulations create a unique vantage point from which learners can see the world through the eyes of another person in order to gain new insights into their feelings, perspectives, and experiences [4].

Against this backdrop we developed the Virtual Empathy Museum, an innovative digital resource that includes evidenced-based teaching materials such as simulation activities and digital stories designed to enhance healthcare students' and practitioners' empathy skills and enable them to make a positive impact on patient care.

This presentation will introduce the Virtual Empathy Museum with a particular focus on the relationship between empathy and patient outcomes and how simulation-based learning can be used to enhance healthcare professionals' empathy skills.

References

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