Simulation Enhances Soft Skills Among Inter-Professionals Participating in an International Service-Learning Experience to a Resource-Limited Country

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Simulation Enhances Soft Skills Among Inter-professionals Participating in an International Service-Learning Experience to a Resource Limited Country

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INTRODUCTION:
• Soft skills encompass many elements of emotional intelligence for quality patient-centered care.¹
• Service-learning can effectively teach soft skills to health care providers (HCP).² ³
• Evidence suggests that adding simulation to pre-departure training (PDT) for service-learning will better prepare HCP to resolve ethical and cultural dilemmas⁴ plus facilitate soft skills.⁴ ⁵
• Limited research exists for establishing best-practice using simulation for HCP in preparing for service to a resource limited country.

PURPOSE:
• Does simulation training improve soft skills of physical and occupational therapy students and clinicians providing rehabilitation services on a one-week service-learning experience in Guatemala?

METHODS:
• A convenience sample of 21 physical and occupational therapy students and clinicians who participated in four 1-hour PDTs before traveling to Guatemala were included in this qualitative study using grounded-theory methods.
• PDT consisted of didactic, reflective and simulation components designed to introduce self-awareness, team-building, cultural knowledge, and trip preparations.
• 4 debriefings were recorded using open-ended questions with a thematic approach around the concept of preparedness and cultural adaptability.
• The dependent variable was subject preparedness and cultural adaptability. The independent variable was a 20-minute simulation emphasizing cultural and socio-emotional challenges of the resource limited country.
• Researchers independently coded transcripts for themes

RESULTS:
• 6 themes emerged: confidence, empathy, communication, mentorship, self-knowledge, cultural competency
• As a result of the simulation experience, participants stated they were better able to respond to distressing situations encountered in Guatemala by utilizing soft skills

DISCUSSION:
• Responding empathetically to patient’s in moments of distress was a highly evident theme within the participant’s dialogue.
• From the simulation encounter-participants demonstrated a complete lack of response to an emotionally charged situation.
• Onsite in Guatemala-participants were able to respond in a highly empathetic manner when faced with similar situations.
• Self-knowledge is commonly thought to be the initial stage of personal growth, and participants expressed the service-learning experience, supported by the PDT simulation, stirred significant maturation.

CONCLUSION:
• Simulation for enhancement of international service-learning trips is recommended as best practice to prepare HCP in facing ethical and cultural demands of resource-limited countries.
• Simulation appears effective for developing self-regulatory skills, especially in response to culturally-novel, emotionally-charged settings.

REFERENCES:

Table representing participant’s feedback gathered during debriefings supporting emerging themes

| CONFIDENCE | “The point I’m trying to make with this is that simulation helped me realize what I’m going into in another month and understanding that it’s certainly a quick pace.” |
| EMPATHY | “From the sim lab, it was just really, real because (today in clinic) there was a patient telling me about her history of abuse with her husband, and how he broke her ulna in a fight. And so, I had to really kind of control my empathy, you have to really keep it in check.” |
| COMMUNICATION | One clinician advised a student following the simulation encounter: “When you’re asking a question, look at the patient, not the translator, really look into their eyes.” |
| MENTORSHIP | Self-knowledge | “So, from that (simulation), I learned that it’s OK to stop what you’re doing and to be with that person because they are human.” |
| CULTURAL | COMPETENCY | “I do feel prepared, but coming to a completely different world from where we live, I was faced with stories and situations that just still blow my mind and break your heart.” |

Photo of Garbage Dump Community in Guatemala City. Photo Cred: Danielle Sigman

Photo of PT/OT clinic within community center in the Garbage Dump community.

Photo Cred: Danielle Sigman