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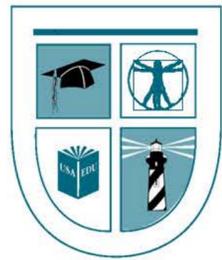
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## Simulation Enhances Soft Skills Among Inter-professionals Participating in an International Service-Learning Experience to a Resource Limited Country

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### INTRODUCTION:

- Soft skills encompass many elements of emotional intelligence for quality patient-centered care.<sup>1</sup>
- Service-learning can effectively teach soft skills to health care providers (HCP).<sup>2-3</sup>
- Evidence suggests that adding simulation to pre-departure training (PDT) for service-learning will better prepare HCP to resolve ethical and cultural dilemmas<sup>3</sup> plus facilitate soft skills.<sup>4-5</sup>
- 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 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

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

<b>CONFIDENCE</b>	"The point I'm trying to make with this is that <i>simulation</i> helped me realize what I'm going into in another month and understanding that it's certainly a quick pace."
<b>EMPATHY</b>	"From the <i>sim</i> 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."
<b>COMMUNICATION MENTORSHIP</b>	One clinician advised a student following the <i>simulation</i> encounter: "When you're asking a question, look at the patient, not the translator, really look into their eyes."
<b>SELF-KNOWLEDGE</b>	"So, from that ( <i>simulation</i> ), I learned that it's OK to stop what you're doing and to be with that person because they are human."
<b>CULTURAL COMPETENCY</b>	"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 your 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.

### DISCUSSION:

- Responding empathically 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.

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