

The Victorian Simulated Patient Network: Evaluation of a statewide resource

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Introduction

- There has been significant uptake of simulation-based education (SBE) in the past decade. SBE permits learning opportunities that can be difficult to access with other educational methods
- Health Workforce Australia (HWA), a national government organisation responsible for health workforce development, has funded several Programs at both national and state levels
- In conjunction with the Department of Health, HWA implemented the Simulated Learning Environments Program to support the use of simulation to increase clinical training capacity and efficiency, and to influence the adoption of new and innovative training techniques¹
- Simulated patients (SPs) are one of several simulation modalities, defined as 'proxies' for real patients. SPs are well people trained to portray patients and to provide feedback from a patient perspective to learners and clinicians
- Internationally, SPs make a significant contribution to high stakes assessments and continuing professional development²
- The Victorian Simulated Patient Network (VSPN) project focuses on developing faculty with an interest in SP methodology

The VSPN

The VSPN consists of three elements

1. A network of faculty with a special interest in SP methodology
2. Web-based modules for people working with SPs
3. Faculty development workshops delivered across the state to promote the potential of SP educators

1. Network

- Anyone can join the network through the VSPN website³
- Membership is free
- After joining, members receive a unique username and password that allows access the online modules

2. Online modules

- The VSPN consists of 13 modules developed by local, national and international experts in SP methodology
- The modules are a resource for the introduction and quality assurance of both new and/or existing SP programs. Each module is designed to inspire creative ways of working with SPs
- The modules of the VSPN are listed in Box 1

3. Workshops

- Face to face workshops were held across the state of the Victoria at higher education and health service organisations in both metropolitan and regional areas
- Each workshop outlined theoretical underpinning of SP methodology
- Participants were involved in a practical activity that demonstrated an example of SP practice

Photo: Medical student working with a simulated patient (SP) and simulated parent in a communication skills session



Box 1: Modules on the VSPN website

	Module
1	Introduction to SP methodology
2	SP Program management
3	Creating roles for SPs
4	Training methods for SPs – role portrayal
5	Training methods for SPs - feedback
6	The art and science of teaching and learning with SPs using audiovisual review
7	SPs in assessments
8	Developing hybrid simulations
9	SPs and moulage
10	Debriefing SPs after simulation events
11	SPs in action
12	Interprofessional SP-based education
13	Children as SPs

Photo: VSPN website home page www.vspn.edu.au



Evaluation methods

Network

- Basic demographic data collected from members

Online modules

- All modules were reviewed by content experts
- Members completed module evaluations with numerical scores and free text feedback at the end of each module
- Purposively sampled members participated in individual interviews

Workshops

- Paper evaluation forms completed by attendees
- Participants rated their satisfaction of aspects of workshop (1 = not at all and 6 = completely)

Analysis

- Descriptive statistics for numerical data
- Textual responses analysed thematically

Human research ethics approval was obtained for the study

Results

Network

- 309 members (as of 5/9/2013)
- Australian (253) and international (56) members
- Members identify their profession as medicine (42), nursing (87), allied health (39), education (74), SPs (49) and other (18)

Online modules

- For module 1, quantitative data demonstrated the degree to which participants met the learning objectives. Mean scores ranging 5.2-5.6/6 across the four objectives
- Participants' free text responses revealed they learnt:
 - The diversity in SP terminology
 - Scope of SP practice
 - Organizational resources required for SP programs
 - Resources for designing SP-based simulations
 - Available literature relating to SP practices

Workshops

- 95 participants attended seven (7) workshops held across the state
- Six (6) were for designed for faculty and one (1) workshop was designed as a SP faculty development event
- SP demonstration was a highly valued activity. Mean score 5.5/6 (n=67)
- Facilitators expertise was appreciated. Mean score of 5.6/6 (n=87)
- Introduction and presentation of network was well received. Mean score 5.2/6 (n=87)
- SPs reported they greatly appreciated the opportunity to practice aspects of SP work, mainly providing feedback

Photo: Medical student working with a simulated patient in a hybrid simulation (combination of SP and part task trainer)



Discussion

- The VSPN is an innovative faculty development opportunity for SP educators and SPs
- The web based resources are highly accessible but are best partnered with an opportunity for a face to face workshop
- Attendees at workshops highly valued the opportunity to network and be involved in practical activities with SPs
- SPs appreciated the effort to establish an association to represent their profession
- There is scope for the network to extend nationally and internationally
- Ongoing funding to support the sustainability of the network continues to be challenging

References

1. Department of Health, Victoria Simulated Learning Environments Program. Retrieved 12 January 2013, from <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/placements/projects.htm>
2. Austin Z, Gregory P, Tabak D. Simulated patients vs. standardized patients in objective structured clinical examinations. Am J Pharm Educ. 2006 Oct 15;70(5):119
3. The Victorian Simulated Patient Network (2013). Accessed 6/8/2013, <http://www.vspn.edu.au/>

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