

## Using standardized family members to teach communication skills and ethical principles to critical care trainees

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We sought to determine the effectiveness of standardized family members (SFMs) in improving the communication skills and ethical and legal knowledge of senior intensive care unit trainees.

We developed a communication workshop featuring a short didactic session and 4 simulated family meetings using trained professionals as SFMs. We then tested the effectiveness of this workshop by:

- (1) using multiple-choice tests to measure improvement in ethical and legal knowledge,
- (2) using subjective evaluation by SFMs and staff facilitators to assess improvement in communication skill, and
- (3) using Likert scales to assess improvement in comfort with communication among Critical Care Medicine trainees.

Thirty-three postgraduate critical care medicine subspecialty trainees participated in the workshop over a 3-year period. Ethical and legal knowledge and comfort scores improved significantly among trainees who participated in the workshop. Trainees who participated in 2 simulated family meetings had significantly higher communication scores on their second simulation. Trainees who had observed a colleague during a simulated family meeting prior to their own first simulated family meeting had significantly higher communication scores than trainees who had not observed a colleague.

Communication scores remained high on a 1-year follow-up simulation. Ninety percent of trainees felt that the workshop had met their learning needs and would recommend it to other trainees. Our workshop was an effective interactive tool for improving ethical and legal knowledge, and our simulated family meetings produced a significant and durable improvement in communication skill among critical care medicine trainees.