

## Understanding the patient's story: A theatre approach to the education of residents

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By harnessing the power of theatre techniques, we propose a novel model for the teaching and evaluation of empathy in residents and seek to: (1) engage students in role reversal to experience other perspectives via "receptive empathy", and (2) offer insight into nonverbal communication and how to interpret the nonverbal communication of others. The experiential aspect of the course seeks to enhance the Communicator, Collaborator and Professional domains.

Six 2.5 hour sessions focus on drama games to instill presence and build camaraderie, improvisation and scene studies with "character talkbacks," where students examine the motivations of the characters that they are playing. Students are pushed to explore beyond their comfort zones through the use of challenging exercises, such as "making contact," where individuals stand in front of their peers and learn to expose their emotions, and "Silent Scenes," which emphasize the role of nonverbal communication in ascertaining underlying patient concerns. Students alternate playing patient and doctor roles, undergoing frequent perspective shifts. Experienced facilitators highlight parallels between these exercises and patient encounters.

In implementing the course for first-year medical students, we noted an improvement in confidence, communication skills and empathy. Students learned techniques to mitigate the crippling fear that can arise from being in novel and unpredictable scenarios. They learned the value of creating "moments" with patients through body language and learned how to dynamically respond to concerns without having to resort to canned answers. We explore the challenges and possible benefits of implementing a similar course at the resident level.