

The development of a simulation-enhanced workshop for teaching challenging communication skills to paediatric residents

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Keywords:	Communicator, simulation, Paediatrics

Studies report physician discomfort disclosing difficult information to patients and families. We developed a simulation-based Communicator workshop to provide pediatric residents with the skills and opportunities to practice them and then had experts and parents assess resident performance to see if there was improvement.

Thirty-three residents attended a 2-part workshop. The literature was discussed and residents were taught a strategy for approaching difficult conversations. Then groups of 3–4 residents and a preceptor rotated through 3 scenarios, each consisting of a simulated resuscitation to activate participants and encounters with standardized patients (SPs) acting as family members. Each resident had a difficult conversation with at least one SP and observed other residents. Following each encounter the preceptor led a debriefing. Residents completed self-assessments and a workshop evaluation.

Before and after the workshop, residents had difficult conversations with SPs in an observed structured clinical encounter (OSCE) and DVDs were scored by expert and parent reviewers. All participants reported increased confidence in their skills. The workshop and the simulation component were rated as excellent or outstanding by 91% and 97% of participants, respectively. Two experts and 2 parents scored the DVDs. Significant rater agreement was found ($\kappa = 0.463$, $p < 0.001$ for experts; $\kappa = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$ for parents). Scores revealed statistically significant improvement in communication skills pre and post workshop with parents having higher ratings than experts.

While it is important that residents reported an increase in confidence in their skills as a result of their participation in the workshop, perhaps the most significant finding is that parents who reviewed resident performances reported an improvement.