Simulated Standardised Tutorials on Clinical Placements: The Dietetic Student Telehealth Experience

Marie-Claire O'Shea[1], Monique Waite[1], Neil Tuttle[1], Andrea Bialocerkowski[1]

1 Health Practice Innovation, Griffith Health Institute, Griffith University.
Email: m.oshea@griffith.edu.au

Abstract

Aim: The Simulated Telemedicine Environment Project for Students (STEPS) was embedded within the Nutrition and Dietetics Professional Placements course at Griffith University with the aim of providing standardised tutorials for all students. The secondary aim was to increase skills in using telehealth to provide dietary advice to patients. This study reports preliminary results of students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the remotely accessed simulated learning program.

Methods: Twenty-seven students from the Fourth Year Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics and 36 students from the Second Year Masters of Nutrition and Dietetics attending Professional Placement participated in the compulsory STEPS program. Each student participated in up to five sessions, of approximately fours hours in length. Activities included history taking, medical condition research and the provision of dietary advice to a simulated patient via the videoconferencing platform, WebEx. Peer feedback was also embedded into each activity.
Pre and post evaluation surveys containing likert scale questions and short qualitative questions were utilised to assess range of the students' perceptions relating to

a) confidence in providing nutrition related care via telehealth
b) intrinsic motivation relating to simulated learning
c) the usefulness of the activity for developing communication, patient assessment and patient management skills, and
d) the usability of the WebEx system.

Results: The preliminary survey results (n=16) indicated that following the simulation, 14 (88%) students felt confident in their interpersonal skills. While only half the students reported interest in the simulated activities it was evident that this form of learning did not result in tension and anxiety in approximately 90% of students.
Ten (63%) students reported that the simulated learning had a positive impact on their performance in communication, patient assessment and management skills. In relation to usability, over 50% (n=9) thought the videoconferencing system was easy to use.
Free responses around positive program experiences related to the type, amount and quality of the feedback received during the sessions. When asked to discuss the least effective aspect of simulated learning, 53% (n=7) of the students that responded to the question, suggested that the STEPS program should be run prior to clinical placement to improve skills and allow more time with 'real patients'.

Conclusions: Incorporating STEPS into University Professional Placement may assist students' perceived confidence in developing communication skills with patients. Students reported the clinical educator feedback provided during the STEPS program was most beneficial to their learning, however most agreed that developing skills in telehealth should be reserved for non-clinical placement time.

Following the completion of the STEPS program, the remaining 47 students will have completed the program and surveys.
Further analysis of the results will enable Nutrition and Dietetics staff to determine future plans for simulated learning to enhance skill development and experiential learning in telehealth