

PERSPECTIVE

A day in the life of a Simulated Participant

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Introduction

With a light-hearted and fun spirit, while capturing a few serious aspects of the work, this poem, written by a Simulated Participant (SP). It was presented at the annual SP gathering within the Clinical Skills and Simulation Lab (CSSL) at Weill Cornell Medicine – Qatar (WCM-Q), resonated well with all in attendance. It is worth noting that CSSL at WCM-Q holds an annual SP luncheon to express the heartfelt gratitude to the SPs for their hard work and invaluable contributions to the programme. Given the context in which it was read, the poem captures the unique experiences, challenges and rewarding moments of being an SP, all delivered with warmth and humour.

The lights are dimmed. Take up your positions,
Into exam rooms, under sterile conditions.
“2 Minutes to Start” booms Lan’s voice overhead,
Should I sit on the chair or lie on the bed?

Who’s more nervous, the student or me?
The cameras are rolling, for all to see.
Get into character, pretend you’re in pain,
Revising your lines “What’s my name again?”

The student enters, announcing their role,
A 100% is their ultimate goal.
“How should I address you?” The student asks,
For this is one question they need for their task.

I’m Sunny today who gets terribly stressed,
Last week I was Sarah who had a bad chest.
Before was Roberta who was wanting to stop,
But racy Arabella was the best of the lot!

We tiptoe through CSSL in slippers and gowns,
While aspiring doctors go about their rounds.
We’ve taken great care of our appearance today,
Depicting the patient we have to portray.

“Associated symptoms?” The student asks,
We list and observe them, while we multitask
Saying verbatims, whilst noting their skills,
Did they correctly perform their Heaves and their Thrills?

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“5 Minutes remaining” booms Lan’s voice like before,
Oh do hurry up – there’s still so much more.
We want them to finish, like kids of our own,
From Pre-med to 4th Year, these students we’ve known.

The lounge is abuzz and we chat to each other,
Grab a snack before we take on another.
Then we clock in our hours, the workday is done,
De-roling completed, let’s go have some fun!

We venture outdoors in this gorgeous weather,
Our colleagues are friends, we do stuff together.
Happy Hours, breakfasts, nights out in the city,
Thanks to Justine on our social committee.

Two hours of home study, now time to rest,
A good night’s sleep to perform at our best.
We’re Erna tomorrow, another OSCE day,
Poor girl had convulsions that we must portray.

As expats we come to this place of learning,
The team at CSSL keep the wheels turning,
A professional team, keeping us on our toes,
Facilitating doctors of the future, this career they chose.

Reflection from the author of the poem

Delivered at the Annual WCM-Q SP gathering in March 2024, this poem was created to reflect the unique journey of SPs, shaped from first-hand experience. Inspired by a blend of dedication and empathy that defines the SP role, it offered an opportunity to celebrate the collective experience, highlighting the preparation, professionalism involved as well as the strong sense of camaraderie within the SP community. Added with a twist of humour, it is aimed to shed light on the behind-the-scenes nuances, which are relatable to the SPs. The rewarding nature of the work in helping students to flourish in confidence and communication is relatable to SPs, many of whom have children of similar ages. Great lifelong friendships are cultivated beyond the workplace due to the nature of the expatriate community within WCM-Q.

Standards of best practice

Portraying two main perspectives (the learner’s and the SP’s), it fits well within the five domains of the Standards of Best Practice informed by the five underlying values of the Association of Standardized Patient Education, which are safety, quality, professionalism, accountability and collaboration [1].

Benefits to learners

Studies have shown that not only do students find simulation more realistic when it is SP-based rather than role-playing with other fellow learners, but it also enables them to practice consultations, sometimes challenging ones in a safe way, rendering them more confident when faced with similar real-life situations. They also enable them to

improve aspects of their communication skills, such as verbal and non-verbal behaviours [2].

Preparation and standardization

The first part of the poem focuses on encounters with students during formative and summative assessments, in particular, as it illustrates tasks performed by an SP, such as adhering to a script as part of standardization or repeatability of a scenario while observing learner skills [3,4]. This is projected in the first two stanzas that cover considerations of what an SP undergoes in the last few minutes prior to an encounter, when every SP embodies the character, rehearsing the lines from the script and the demeanour. In addition, remembering points of observation for the purposes of assessment and feedback forms part of the contemplation of an SP. According to Lewis *et al.* [1], the feedback provided by SPs to students plays a critical role in a learner’s experience and development, specifically in terms of interpersonal domain.

Role portrayal

Captured therein is a notion of nerves, both on the part of the students and the SPs. The students aspire to achieve the best possible mark from the encounter, whereas the SPs strive to portray the character the best they can while being as observant as possible in order to reach the fairest possible assessment and feedback. During training sessions, SPs rehearse the character and are exposed to a whole range of situations that they could face during student encounters so that they are fully ready to not only portray the character but also to handle various circumstances consistently [1,5].

SP well-being and community

Additionally, the latter part of this composition exposes components of what happens behind the scenes, when an SP is outside the examination room, as well as within the SP community outside of work. It indicates the enjoyment of the work that SPs do and the social connections that it creates, specifically as expatriates. The diverse group of SPs, who are presently all expatriates, represent various cultures from around the globe, which brings a unique richness to the learning environment.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this short article, based on the analysis of the poem, illustrates varied facets of the life of an SP: the essential dimensions of the work, the thought processes, elements within and outside of work, all in a fun manner.

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