

IN PRACTICE

A43

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING FOR WARD STAFF: LISTENING TO PATIENTS AND RELATIVES

Carrie Hamilton¹, Victoria Aldridge², Paula Dawson², Zoe Broughton², Caroline Tomkins¹, Kirsten Howson¹, Nichola Martin¹; ¹*SimComm Academy, United Kingdom*; ²*Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, United Kingdom*

Correspondence: carrie.hamilton@simcommacademy.com
10.54531/CXQB5705

Introduction: Effective communication remains a cornerstone of compassionate healthcare, closely linked to patient experience and care outcomes [1]. In 2022, the Comprehensive Communication Skills Training (CCST) course was developed at a medium-sized trust, in response to feedback from bereaved families and frontline staff, aiming to improve communication in emotionally complex scenarios [2]. Preceding the creation of the course, the facilitators attended a two-day training in experiential learning. Since its inception, the course has been refined;

a Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) component, produced through a listen-create-reconnect exercise with relatives with lived experience, has been added. This development helps attendees understand how to respond to complaints in the moment and highlights the function of PALS as a key support service for patients and families. **Methods:** The training uses immersive simulation, with actor role players enacting authentic patient and family encounters. This encourages deep emotional engagement and reflection. Participants follow the journey of an elderly inpatient, and his wife, encountering pivotal communication challenges during his final hospital stay.

The effectiveness of this training is credited with the collaboration; scenarios and debrief content, which are shaped by the real stories of patients and bereaved relatives, whose voices are woven throughout the training. This ensures the course content remains both emotionally resonant and grounded in lived experience, a hallmark of meaningful communication education [3].

Results: Approximately 300 trust staff have participated, all describe an increased confidence in managing difficult conversations. The newly introduced PALS module has been a welcome addition with participants reporting a better understanding of the role of PALS in supporting patients. Participants have highlighted the value of the emotional realism, the protected space for self-reflection, and the power of hearing service user stories in their own words.

In 2023/2024 poor communication was indicated as the primary theme in 100% of the complaints made in relation to end of life care. Current complaints data for the trust shows a significant reduction related to this theme, attributable to just 22% (1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024).

Discussion: By blending experiential learning with patient-informed narrative and structured reflection, participants reconsider how they listen, respond, and empathise. CCST builds confidence, strengthening trust between staff and patients and attendees feel directly connected to the experiences. The simulation-based transformative I's [4], involvement, inclusion and influence underpin this programme. CCST's growing reputation is leading to the embedding of the training in multi-professional induction and continuing education.

Ethics Statement: As the submitting author, I can confirm that all relevant ethical standards of research and dissemination have been met. Additionally, I can confirm that the necessary ethical approval has been obtained, where applicable.

REFERENCES

1. Wilkinson S, Perry R, Blanchard K, Linsell L. Effectiveness of a three-day communication skills course in changing nurses' communication skills with cancer/palliative care patients: a randomised controlled trial. *Palliative Medicine*. 2008;22(4):365–375.
2. MacLean H. Comprehensive Communication Skills Training (CCST) for Ward Staff. *International Journal of Healthcare Simulation*. 2022;2 (Suppl 1):A67.
3. Gilligan T, Coyle N, Frankel RM, Berry DL, Bohlke K, Epstein RM, Baile WF. Patient-clinician communication: American Society of Clinical Oncology consensus guideline. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2017;35(31):3618–3632.
4. Weldon SM, BATTERY A, Spearpoint K, Kneebone R. Transformative forms of simulation in health care – the seven simulation-based 'I's': a concept taxonomy review of the literature. *International Journal of Healthcare Simulation*. 2023.