Using Human Simulated Patients (SPs) in Medical, Nursing and Health Professional Education – A Review of the Literature

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Aim

This paper presents a review of the literature of simulated patients.

Background

Simulation is a widely used for the development of clinical skills of medical and health professionals. Effective patient interaction is a vital skill for safe clinical practice. Simulated patients (SPs) are one method by which these skills can be taught and assessed in a ‘safe’ environment.

Methods

An electronic search of databases CINAHL, ERIC, Medline, PubMed and Web of Science using the key words ‘simulated patient’, ‘standardized patient’, ‘actor patients’ and ‘human simulators’ was performed. All key words were searched with term ‘education’. Only articles using human SPs were included for review. All articles were evaluated for educational impact.

Results

The search generated articles 650. Inclusion criteria reduced the number of relevant papers to 65. The results show that SPs regularly contribute to education, mainly in medicine. However, there are examples from other professions (nursing, pharmacy).
SPs are also used in skills based training and examinations.

Students largely rate SP based work favourably.

**Conclusions**

Although expanding rapidly, the literature on SP based education has many gaps and often lacks theoretical foundation. Few studies measure changes to behaviour in practice or longer term impact focusing instead of participant reaction to training. It is an exciting field to explore and rich in research opportunities.