Use of a Remote Standardized Patient to Teach Clinical Skills to Undergraduate Medical Students

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Abstract

Medical students are able to practice and learn interviewing skills using a Remote Standardized Patient interview conducted via Internet-based chat. Our assessment has focused on the ability to screen for alcohol or other substance use/misuse/abuse, as part of two NIAAA/NIDA funded projects to develop online educational materials for medical students in years 2-4.

Introduction/Background

Alcohol screening in primary care has been recommended by the US Preventive Services Task Force since 2004 [1]. Further, alcohol-related interventions in primary care have been determined to be among the most cost-effective [2]. Despite this, alcohol and other substance abuse screening is given minimal attention in the typical current medical school curriculum. To address this gap, we have developed a series of online learning modules including a novel "Remote" Standardized Patient interview, occurring via online chat. The remote format allows: easy student assessment through transcripts, a wide range of 'actors' available to portray the SP, and a wider range of flexibility in interview timing.

References

[1] AHRQ, Screening for Alcohol Misuse. http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/uspsdrin.htm. April 2004 (accessed Dec 14, 2008).

[2] Solberg, L, Maciosek, M, Edwards N. Primary Care Intervention to Reduce Alcohol Misuse Ranking Its Health Impact and Cost Effectiveness. *Am J Prev Med* 2008;34(2):143–152.

Method

We are developing a remote Standardized Patient (SP) experience through Internet-chat, expanding on an experience familiar to many via e-commerce interactions with customer service representatives. Two SP cases were created: an SP with a history of alcohol abuse who presents for insomnia, and an SP addicted to Percocet who presents with back and side pain. In the Remote SP experience, the student can review the patient's chart prior to the encounter, through a Web-based interface. During the chat experience, the student conducts a medical interview and can order labs through the webpage. The SP replies via chat. At the conclusion, the student completes a medical note template, including a differential diagnosis and treatment plan for each potential diagnosis.

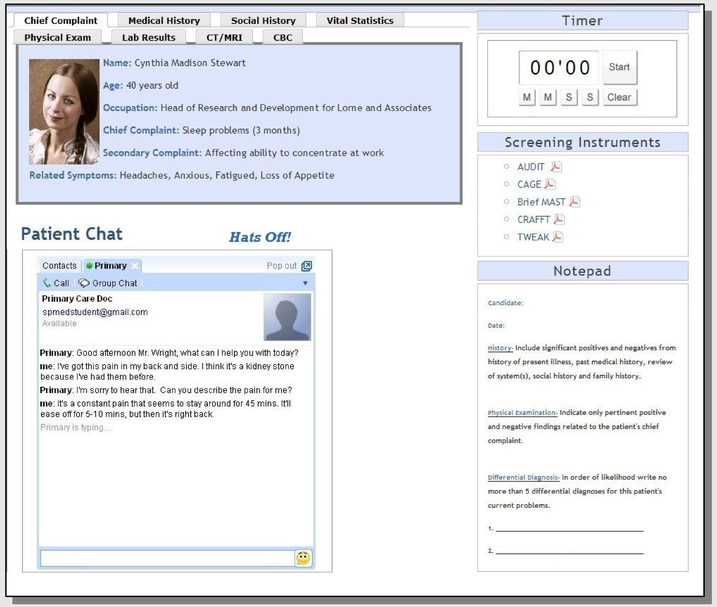
Advantages of a Remote Standardized Patient Interview

- Retainment of the "real time" aspect of an SP encounter while allowing the student time to reflect.
- Quick assessment of student performance through saved chat transcripts, which also provide feedback to the student learner.
- Streamlined cases that convey a wide variety of clinical challenges and variations.
- Prepares students for the telephone interview in the USMLE Step 2 exams.

Results

Results of our initial work indicate that medical students are successfully able to interact via chat, have a positive attitude towards this communication modality, and can practice and improve interviewing skills.

Potential Standardized Patient Protocol



Screen shot of an SP course experience

Future Work

Medical students in years 2-4 are participating in an on-going usability study to assess the viability of expanding this model to large-scale implementation.

Conclusions

This experience achieves multiple goals, allowing students to practice and learn clinical interviewing skills related to alcohol/ substance misuse. Additionally, it provides students the opportunity to become familiar with remote interactions with patients – in essence previewing many of the skills required for effective telehealth practice in the future.

Suggested Citation and Communication

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