Improving Communication in Healthcare Provider Education: A Unique Interprofessional Curriculum

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Abstract

Purpose: Training student providers in how to communicate with patients is mostly passive and assumed to occur by observing mentors in clinical rotations. This learning can be highly variable, and a more intentional approach to teaching these skills is needed. Simulation facilitates learning in a safe environment with observation and feedback. We have identified an evidence-based method using trained actors, who raise the emotional stakes of the discussion. This presentation describes the partnership between the GVSU Physician Assistant program, Theater Department, Kirkhof College of Nursing, and Simulation Center to train future health care providers in high-stakes emotional conversations.

Outcomes:

1. Describe the methodology used to teach students how to engage in high-stakes emotional conversations.
2. Explain the value of the pedagogical strategies used.
3. Highlight the benefits of an interprofessional curriculum.

Background

Communication is of crucial importance in the health care provider- patient relationship, with breaking bad news being one of the most difficult tasks for any member of the health care team. The way it is done may change the nature of the patient - provider relationship permanently- strengthening it, undermining it, damaging it irreparably or even leading to litigation. An increased desire by patients and families to be knowledgeable about their diagnosis leads to increased pressure on health care professionals to share information. However, dissatisfaction with the process is common, and medical staff commonly is perceived as cold and impersonal. Studies have shown that communication skills of health care providers could be improved, with the majority of providers reporting low confidence and discomfort in the task of breaking bad news. Yet, training in breaking bad news is limited and superficial, and often times occurs through observation and trial and error. Because negative role models for giving bad news are common, relying on experience and role-modeling may result in communication patterns that do not meet the patients' needs. Therefore, teaching the skills for delivering bad news increases the likelihood that health care providers will learn how to deliver bad news more effectively.

Gaps in culture of communication

Communication between health care providers, patients, and their families is "consistently identified as the most important and least accomplished factor in quality of care" in the ICU.

Institute of Medicine: Dying in America 2014

Why is this so hard?

- Providing technical/complicated information
- Trust relationship
- Emotion
  - Patient
  - Provider
- No time
- No training
- No incentive

…and many, many other things

Interprofessional Educational Experience

Partnership across GVSU Disciplines

- Physician Assistant (PA) Program
- GVSU Theatre Program
- Kirkhof College of Nursing
- GVSU Simulation Center

Vital Talk Model

A program that makes navigating tough conversations easier and teaches communication skills for the delivery of serious and difficult news.

Objectives: Delivering Serious News

- Short didactic on skills important for Delivering Serious News
  - **Ask-Tell-Ask**
    - Is now a good time to talk?
  - **Recognize and Respond to Emotion using NURSE**
    - Name: "You seem worried?"
    - Understand: "This must be an incredibly tough situation for you and your family."
    - Respect: " It seems like your father is surrounded by supportive family."
    - Support: "We will work with you to figure out the next steps. "
    - Explore: "Help me understand what you are going through."
- Giving positive, specific feedback with notes
- Demonstrate a simulated family meeting

VITAL talk

Results

How important do you think is it for a PA to be able to communicate well with patients and family of seriously ill patients?

	Pre	Post	
Extremely important	97.14% (34/35)	94.44% (34/36)	
Very important	2.86% (1/35)	5.56% (2/36)	
Moderately important	0	0	P= 0.545
Slightly important	0	0	
Not at all important	0	0	

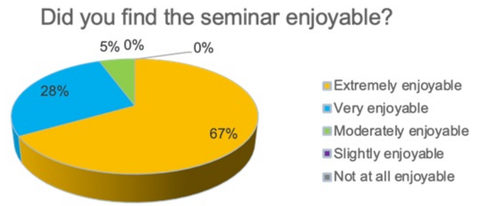
Have you thought about how you would approach communicating bad news?

	Pre	Post	
Extremely important	25.71% (9/35)	41.67% (3415/36)	
Very important	74.29% (26/35)	58.33% (21/36)	
Moderately important	0	0	P= 0.178
Slightly important	0	0	
Not at all important	0	0	

How competent do you feel (now) to communicate bad news?

	Pre	Post	
Extremely important	0	0	
Very important	31.43% (11/35)	75% (22/36)	
Moderately important	28.57% (10/35)	16.67%(6/36)	P< 0.0001
Slightly important	40% (14/35)	8.33% (3/36)	
Not at all important	0	0	

Results



Formative qualitative assessment: Themes

Knowledge Gained

- I feel that I learned a lot and wished I would have had this prior to practicums
- This seminar was very beneficial and opened my eyes to the importance of effective communication, especially when it comes to delivering bad news…. I know that delivering difficult news to a patient and/or their loved ones will be one of the most challenging responsibilities, but this seminar was awesome and has taught me how I can handle these sensitive matters and how I can continue to improve my communication skills.

Impact of Seminar:

- It was amazing, I would love for it to be incorporated into our program.
- Communicating serious medical news effectively is vital to providing patient care.
- I think this would be a great addition to our program. …. Having the opportunity to learn with and from our peers in this sort of environment would be a great help.

Conclusions

IMPORTANCE: All students surveyed recognized the importance of communication skills in the provider/patient relationship

Improvement: There was significant improvement in self-efficacy for delivering bad news after the skills seminar for both PA and NP students

Helpful: Adding a communication program into curriculum was perceived as helpful for PA and NP programs as well as for health profession training in general

The ability to connect more deeply with patients is an important skill for any health care provider. It improves both patient and provider satisfaction, by increasing the provider's ability to adjust to the situation. The model described is strengthened by its interprofessional collaboration. Students experience real life scenarios through the performance of trained improvisational actors. Feedback is provided from nursing as well as PA faculty who facilitate the sessions, positively impacting the health of future patients through interprofessional collaborative practice.