Top Tips for Simulated Patients Role-Playing Online for Learning Consultation Skills Online

EACH | International Association for Communication in Healthcare

Winterburn, Sandra & Rosenbaum, Marcy. April 2020

Introduction and Background

It is widely acknowledged that face to face teaching using role-play, feedback & re-rehearsal is the gold standard for communication skills teaching but during the Covid-19 pandemic other methods need to be explored and new innovative approaches used.

To help in these challenging times the **EACH: International Association of Communication in Healthcare** has put together a series of practical guides aimed at helping teachers of healthcare communication, simulated patients and learners consider the challenges and potential adaptations for online communication skills teaching.

It is recommended that, where possible, this guide is used to supplement an online training session prior to teaching. The training works well as a 'mock' / practice experiential session where all participants can experience first-hand the likely process, content and structure of a virtual classroom.

We acknowledge that many different platforms are available and that choices are often influenced by academic institutions or financial constraints. However, for the purpose of this document we have chosen the 'Zoom' platform, and its associated functions, as our worked example. We use the term teacher as representative of other titles such as facilitator, tutor or lecturer. The term simulated patient is used for actors, medical role-player etc and learner or student to represent the participant receiving the teaching.

 If you have any questions or would like to share your own experiences of online teaching, we would love to hear from you.

Setting the scene

- Please dress appropriately – as you would for a normal session or to represent the patient you are portraying.
- Try and ensure that your camera is positioned so that you can sit comfortably, with your head and shoulders clearly visible.
- Try to ensure your camera is positioned to avoid extreme light levels.
  Particularly avoid light sources or windows being directly behind you if possible and try to be lit from the front.
- Keep what's behind you as neutral as possible and free from distractions.
  Personal objects and decor that may not fit with the patient you are portraying may reduce the authenticity of the role-play.
- Try to minimize background noise and position yourself somewhere quiet if you can. If there are people around, let them know that you are working.

If you are using a spare room or home office, it might be worth popping a sign on your door reminding everyone you'll be role-playing and how long the session will last.

- You must make ensure you are in a space where you cannot be overheard or overseen by others to maintain confidentiality for all participants.

Tips for role-playing to camera

Role-playing in this environment may be challenging at first. Here a few tips for making your delivery as smooth as possible.

- For most online meetings, we often look down at the image of the person we are talking to. When the role-play is in progress, try as much as possible to look directly into your camera when talking – this will give the student the best opportunity to pick up on non-verbal and physical cues (and is also a good signifier that you are in role).
- Much as you would in a face to face setting, it might be useful to give yourself a physical position to denote being in and out of role. This could be as simple as sitting forward, closer to camera when role-playing, and sitting back when out of role.
- When asked for feedback, keep it as succinct as possible and stick to the rule of identifying something that was said and how it made you feel

Technology

One of the biggest challenges for delivering online teaching is mastering the technology. You will be delivering a professional role-play /simulated patient session, so having appropriate equipment and stable connections are essential.

Devices

Using a Laptop or Desktop computer offers a much better experience over a tablet or phone and we would strongly recommend using one for teaching sessions if possible.

Views

There are 2 main video layouts on zoom

- Speaker view– This is the *default* setting on zoom. It will switch the large video window between to the person actively speaking at the time.
- Gallery view - This is the *preferred* setting for your consultation skills sessions as it allows you to see displays of all of your group and your tutor in a grid pattern.
- To switch from Speaker view to Gallery view go to the upper right corner of your Zoom window and click on the grid icon.

To find out more visit the link below:

https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362323-How-Do-I-Change-The-Video-Layout-

Screen name / Patient's name

Each participant has a 'screen name' showing throughout.

Please note: when you are role-playing a particular patient either the tutor will or you can change your screen name to the name of the patient the students are about to interview.

To rename yourself hover your mouse over your name in the "Participants" list on the right side of the Zoom window. Click on "Rename". Enter the name you'd like to appear in the class and click on "OK"

There is also the option for adding some clinical details as an aide memoire for the students if required. E.g. John Smith, 53, Emergency admission with chest pain.

Dealing with technical issues

Checking in early to confirm technology is working OK.

- Check in early to confirm your technology is working OK. It is recommended that you go online at least 15 minutes before the teaching begins to troubleshoot any potential technical difficulties.
- Some difficulties with audio and internet connections are inevitable; if you are unable to hear anything which is being said to you during a role-play or during feedback, ask for it to be repeated.
- Echo: Switch off any of your other devices in order to reduce noise/feedback loops distorting the sound. Generally, if you are hearing echo, it means that there is a device out there that is channelling your audio back. Tutors can mute the students/role-players one at a time or mute/unmute all to see where the problem is coming from. Students/role-players can mute him/herself which can help if necessary.
- If you identify a problem or issue which needs addressing during the session, send a message to the teacher using the Chat function.

https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-Meeting-Chat

My video camera isn't working

If you cannot get your video to start working look at the bottom left hand corner of your screen to see if a red line is showing. If it is, click on the video camera icon to remove the red line, this will open your camera. It will take a few seconds.

To stop your camera, click on the video camera again, the red line should appear. Clicking on this during role-play means you will stay connected to the class via audio but cannot be seen. Your profile will show as a blank screen with your name in the bottom.

If you are using a camera other than the one integral to your computer, you will need to ensure you have selected the correct video source. This can be done by clicking on arrow next to video and picking the camera you wish to use.
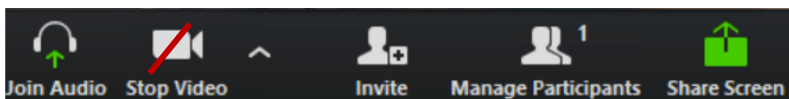
If camera problems persist make sure that all other programs that utilise the camera are closed. If all else fails, try restarting your computer.

Debriefing

- It is important to take the opportunity to debrief each session with the facilitator at the end of each session.
  Debriefing should include feedback on: How the SP is feeling after the session
- How the session was delivered overall
- Portrayal of patient online
- Quality and quantity of feedback
- Technical aspects of delivery