

# Preparing physiotherapy students for clinical placement: student perceptions of peer-simulation.

Narelle J Dalwood<sup>1</sup>, Prue Morgan<sup>1</sup>, Stephen Maloney<sup>1</sup>, Narelle S Cox<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Physiotherapy Department, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University, PO Box 527 Frankston, Victoria, 3199, Australia. [narelle.dalwood@monash.edu](mailto:narelle.dalwood@monash.edu)

## Background

Simulated patients are increasingly utilised in undergraduate health care education, yet the financial costs of simulation can be prohibitive for physiotherapy programs. This study aimed to investigate if low cost peer-simulation is perceived by students as valuable in preparing them for clinical placements.

## Method

Third-year (pre-clinical) physiotherapy students participated in weekly peer-simulation sessions, using each other as patients. At the commencement and completion of nine weeks of simulation, students completed surveys (five point Likert scale) investigating perceptions of simulation. Additionally, eight fourth-year student volunteers joined staff in the simulated role of 'clinical supervisors' and were invited to evaluate simulation via survey. Responses are reported as mean score/5, sd.

## Results

Of 79 third-year students, over 63% completed the surveys. All fourth-year 'mock-supervisors' completed surveys. Third-year students rated simulation highly for improving clinical reasoning (4.7, 0.5), confidence for clinics (4.2,0.6), communication (4.5,0.5), and identifying deficits in knowledge and skills (4.6,0.5). Students reported simulation to be challenging, engaging, safe and supportive (4.4,0.5). Categories of 'understanding of patient perspective' and 'clinical realism' rated less well (3.7,0.7 and 3.6,0.6 respectively). Fourth-year students reported feeling more confident for their future role as clinical educators (4.8,0.5) with an increased understanding of the clinician perspective (4.6,0.5). Clinical realism was rated less highly (3.5,0.8).

## Discussion

Pre-clinical physiotherapy students perceived low cost peer-simulation as challenging, safe and supportive, and valuable for clinical preparation. Third-year students had high expectations of the simulation program prior to commencement and these expectations were consistently met. Both Year 3 and 4 students felt peer-simulation enhanced communication, clinical reasoning skills, confidence for clinics and understanding of the clinician perspective, despite lower ratings for clinical realism.

These findings support further investigation to identify the degree of realism required to achieve optimal benefits of simulation, and a cost-effectiveness comparison between different levels of simulation fidelity.