

CASE STUDY: Simulated Role-Play Develops Cognitive Empathy

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“Before Healthcare Theatre, I truly was only a student mindful of my own trials and struggles...This class has allowed me to grow in ways that I can't even externalize. By placing myself into the shoes of those who consider themselves unwanted, unloved, and ignored, I have become a much more empathetic person.”



We have all heard about the “Scrooge conversion” of a cantankerous care provider that had some sort of medical or surgical issue. Once recovered, they approach patient care with much more empathy and understanding.

Now, more than ever, we need to focus on supporting the development of empathy in our care providers. A deficit in cognitive empathy leads to poor patient outcomes and burnout. Studies show that this generation has 40% less empathy when compared to students 30 years ago. The compelling question many educators are trying to answer is how can we fit one more thing into our overladen curriculum.

Some hospitals have gone so far as to anonymously “admit” their medical interns to the hospital for 24 hours so they could experience the patient care from the other side of the bed. While this model is unsustainable and potentially dangerous to the “patient interns”, there is another option – roleplay. Researchers have recruited medical student to compare the effect of playing the part of the physician and playing the part of a patient. All participants completed a final simulation where blinded psychologists scored the participants on a variety of items. Most significantly, the study revealed that the participants whom played the patient showed **statistical significant positively correlated scores** for “understanding the perspective of the parent”. This study and others, document the positive correlation of roleplay in simulation and the development of

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