

Working effectively with trainees using simulation in psychiatry

1 BUILD SAFETY

Performing difficult skills in front of your peers and seniors is guaranteed to be difficult. After a night on call and a difficult morning it can be the last straw.

We recommend doing everything possible to keep the sessions feeling safe and supportive. Give the supportive messages early and often: they often don't get through on the first or even fifth hearing.

'If you want to stop, just time it out'

'If you make a mistake and want to back up 30seconds, feel free'

'If you want to stop and ask the audience, do that'

If trainees don't want the video, switch the camera off and encourage them to do the role play. If they don't want to do the role play, encourage them to participate in the discussion. If they don't want to participate in the discussion, encourage them to come to watch and listen. But always gently push for more.

2 MODEL

Model the skills you want the trainees to employ, from good time keeping and a well structured session to using lots of reflective listening and taking their concerns seriously.

3 ENCOURAGE EXPERIMENTATION

'Try stuff out, don't expect it to work every time. It's better to make a mistake here than with a real patient.'

Discuss the experimentation: 'Take the opportunity to try it in a way you wouldn't dare in real life. We're not assessing you and we know you're experimenting.'

4 KEEP THE LEVEL OF CHALLENGE HIGH...

Be explicit the expectations are high and that you will push people out of their comfort zone. Most doctors thrive off challenge: under challenge often leads to under performance.

'This is a difficult and challenging scenario, which we expect you to find struggle with.'

'This is an advanced level course and not everything will come easily to you.'

5...AND KEEP THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT HIGH TOO

A high level of challenge is not the same as skimping on support. Listen to trainee concerns. Quite junior trainees often face very difficult clinical scenarios: sometimes it is worth deviating a little from the lesson plan to deal with live issues.

Worries about the CASC exam loom large. Without letting the tail of assessment wag the dog of teaching, take every opportunity to drop in exam tips.

Remember that trainees are human too: some of the scenarios can be upsetting and you never know what is going to affect a particular trainee. Allow time at the end of sessions in case of need and be prepared to follow up afterwards.

5 SHARE THE MODEL

In particular, share the idea that improving communications is hard work, that there are multiple right ways of getting it right and that the teacher doesn't have all the answers. Acknowledge the challenges for the trainees and that you are working on developing high level skills, to help them in their day to day clinical practice and for the exam.

6 WATCH THE GROUP DYNAMICS

Stressed trainees may not be the most supportive of their peers. They may be thoughtless or keen to try to impress by pointing out that they have thought of something better to do. Critical comments once voiced cannot be unsaid, and can destroy the confidence of other trainees. Therefore, tread carefully when facilitating their feedback to their peers, consider only asking for positive comments from them initially until the group is well established and you can be more confident about their ability to give constructive feedback.

8 THE LEARNING IS IN THE DEBRIEF

Don't skimp the debrief. The feedback the trainer gives needs to be carefully titrated to the trainees needs. Be aware that trainees will often ask for harsh negative feedback because they have been acculturated to this in medicine – asking for this type of feedback doesn't usually make it easier to hear or use.

9 ENCOURAGE TRAINEES TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN FEEDBACK

‘What would you like us to look for? What particular things do you want to work on?’ Encourage the trainee to ask the actor for the specific feedback they think would be useful to them, e.g. ‘what were you thinking when I asked this question? What did it feel like when I said ...?’.

10 KEEP ROLE PLAYING SEGMENTS BRIEF AND ALLOW CHOICES

Limiting the amount of time trainees have to role play for seems to make it appear less threatening, in addition to keeping the observers’ attention and allowing more trainees the opportunity to role play and time to replay challenging segments. It also helps keep the debrief specific and focused. Allowing trainees to choose what the segment focuses on also reduces fear, enhances control and allows them to address their own specific learning needs, e.g. ‘What would you like to focus on? You could replay the last segment in a different way, or try out Would you like the actor to do anything differently this time?’.