Evaluation of Medical Student Interaction with a Bipolar Virtual Patient Scenario Written by a Peer Support Specialist – a Pilot Study

Authors: Foster, Noseworthy, Shah, Lind, Lok, Chuah, Rossen

Objectives:
Participants will recognize benefits and challenges of integrating interactive virtual patients (VP) in medical student education in psychiatry.

Background:
In context of medical school expansion and with teaching occurring simultaneously at various clinical sites, standardized instruction becomes a challenge. VPs are computer programs that simulate real-life clinical scenarios in which the learner can complete an interview. VPs can potentially cover gaps in clinical exposure while allowing immediate feedback on learner’s performance\(^1,2\). We present data comparing medical students’ interaction with a Web-based versus a life-size VP with bipolar disorder.

Methods:
At Medical College of Georgia, certified peer-support specialists teach mental health recovery principles in rounds, clinics, classroom and small groups to all levels of trainees. A peer support specialist, using Virtual People Factory, has created the Web-based VP scenario of Denise, a woman with psychotic bipolar disorder who presents to psychiatrist to establish care and soon develops a crisis (Fig-1). Using the identical scenario, computer scientists at University of Florida’s Virtual Experiences Research Group created a life size character allowing immersive interaction (Fig-2). In part-1 of the bipolar scenario, the student interacts with the patient and in part-2, the student either has an interaction with her husband by instant messaging in the Web-based version or by telephone in the life-size version. Two groups of 12 third- or fourth-year medical students interacted with either the life-size or the Web-based scenario after Human Assurance Committee Approval and informed consent. Symptoms of manic episode are marked as discoveries and the system provides instant feedback about student’s ability to elicit them.

Results:
100% of medical students elicited suicidal ideation and 92% elicited delusions the Web-browser VP version. The symptom discoveries for the life-size version of the interaction and students’ feedback about the overall interaction are being analyzed and full results will be available at the meeting.

Conclusions:
With further technical refinement, psychiatric VP scenarios can become useful tools to augment clinical teaching.

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References:

Figure 2
Denise Bipolar Virtual Patient Life-size

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Figure 1

Denise Bipolar Virtual Patient Web-based

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