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Simulations Grow Nursing Students' Real-Life Experience

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Cedarville University's school of nursing is already known for developing highly prepared health care professionals, but since the construction of its high-fidelity simulation center in 2012, the school of nursing has increased the use of hands-on learning in clinical courses. This should ensure that Cedarville meets and exceeds industry standards for years to come.

The school of nursing is emphasizing the importance of in-house clinical simulations because they allow students to learn from scenarios that they might not experience in hospital rotations.

To accomplish this, the school of nursing has formed a new 10-member Simulation Task Force Team. The school of nursing hired an outside consultant team through Laerdal Medical and the National League of Nursing to evaluate its current simulation program, create a roadmap for the future and improve its simulation program according to the school's goals and industry standards.

"We can give them 'patients' that we want them to know how to care for, as well as reasoning and critically thinking through problems," Callan said. "Whereas in clinicals, in the hospital setting, we can't make up what patients they have. We get what's there and we don't always get the experiences that our students need."

The high-fidelity mannequins are very complex. They can breathe, blink and produce audible heart and lung sounds.

Nursing clinical simulations are real-life scenarios that help students utilize knowledge and skills to perform high quality hands-on patient care in a non-judgemental and safe environment. In a nursing simulation, the student performs the role of the nurse, while a high-tech, programmable mannequin acts as the patient.

Cedarville's school of nursing has four high-fidelity mannequins. These simulators can be programmed to imitate medical issues that students might eventually treat during their future nursing careers. The mannequins can simulate a wide range of medical scenarios, from breathing difficulties to complicated births.

"Students get to experience simulation in a very controlled setting. The mannequins are very state-of-the-art simulators that can give them an experience that is very true to life, but in a safe way," said Karen Callan, coordinator of nursing lab and facilities.

During a simulation, the mannequin is given a name, age and medical condition. The nursing student receives a verbal report and must assess and respond to their "patient's" condition. As the student

responds to the “patient’s” medical condition, the professors can program new symptoms or resolve the simulation in a separate control room. “If the student isn’t getting to where we need them to go in the simulation scenario, we can give some little clues or make some things more obvious to guide their thinking,” said Kristine Kidder, assistant professor of nursing and coordinator of clinical simulation for the school of nursing.

After the simulation, the students talk through their thought processes during a debriefing time with nursing professors. “We really get to hone in on what their critical thinking was and how they can learn from the scenario,” Kidder added.

The school of nursing uses simulations as a formative teaching strategy in all of its junior and senior student clinical courses. Students work with the high-fidelity simulators in upper-level courses: Care of Ill Adults, Care of Women & Newborns, Care of Children, Behavioral & Mental Health Care, Leadership & Management and Complex Care Management.

“It helps build the confidence and competence of our nursing students,” said Kidder. “They will see a lot of the same patients throughout their time in simulation. The scenarios get a little bit more complex over time, and they are expected to do more. So it actually builds with the program to prepare them to be able to think like a nurse.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.