

LPN student Sarah Athmann, left, tends to the infant of a Somali mother as portrayed by fellow student Moriah Perrault, in a clinical simulation Feb. 14.



Clinical simulations enhance nursing programs

When a laboratory must be equipped with situations and roles in addition to instruments and specimens, it becomes a creative challenge.

In 2005, faculty from St. Cloud State University's Department of Nursing Science accepted that challenge by outlining a multi-faceted project intended to augment nursing students' preparations for their clinical practice.

With assistance and collaboration from nursing faculty at St. Cloud Technical College and Central Lakes College in Brainerd, Joan Wilcox applied for and received funding through Minnesota Colleges and Universities' (MnSCU) Healthcare Education-Industry Partnership. Wilcox is an associate professor and former chair of Nursing Science.

The grant has enabled Wilcox, along with Joyce Simones, associate professor and Nursing Science lead for the project, along with faculty from the partner schools to create simulation scenarios. The scenarios prepare nursing students to work effectively in teams while delivering competent care to culturally diverse patients.

The scenarios include a Native American seven-year-old boy with asthma, a 70-year-old African American gay man admitted with a stroke, a 62-year-old Hispanic woman with diabetes admitted for a possible heart attack, a 70-year-old Caucasian woman who has had hip surgery and has angina, and a postpartum 32-year-old Somali woman and her infant.

The scenarios were designed to occur on a non-specialized community hospital unit.

Of course, the unit and hospital are fictional. So are the cases – although they are convincingly enacted. But the scenarios represent some of the diverse, non-fictional situations to which registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses

(LPNs) in central Minnesota must respond with what Wilcox calls “culturally sensitive care.”

The simulations were also designed to reflect current LPN and RN “scopes of practice,” the range of health care procedures and decisions that may or may not be performed by LPNs or by RNs.

Delegating tasks to and supervising other nursing personnel is an important role of the RN.

Scopes of practice are defined by Minnesota law and by the American Nurses Association, Scope and Standards of Practice (2004), and Wilcox said it is “vital that nurses know what care decisions and practices are within their professional scope and what are not.”

The importance of delegating tasks to and supervising other nursing personnel is an important role of the RN, and simulation experiences with LPN students seem ideal to teach these functions.

“It’s an idea I’ve had for a long time,” Wilcox said. “We expect everybody to work as members of a health team in practice, so it makes sense to prepare them to work together as students.”

And so they are. Senior RN students from St. Cloud State and LPN students from St. Cloud Technical College teamed up for the first time in the laboratory in early February.

During the post-simulation guided debriefing and reflection, students shared what they learned.

“I really learned a lot,” said Kaara Nilsson, following her experience Feb. 14. An RN student, Nilsson rotated among the “patients” with Sarah Athmann, an LPN student at her side.

Nilsson said trying to meet each patient’s individual needs while working as a team for the first time was a valuable exercise.



Senior RN student Magdalene Akumah, right, assesses the vitals of a “confused” geriatric patient as portrayed by Mary Schmitt, a volunteer and retired nurse with 40 years’ experience.

“I need more practice in delegating tasks,” she said.

Larisa Mack, another RN student, said she found the exercise “exciting.” Sara Bukowski, her LPN teammate, spoke of the moment she discovered her diabetic patient had dangerously low blood sugar and remembered immediately that calling the patient’s doctor was not within her scope of practice.

According to Wilcox and Simones, the department’s intentions are to further integrate and refine the project while creating new scenarios each year. The faculty of all collaborating schools say they hope to continue to provide more integrated and collaborative learning experiences. Including students from other disciplines, such as social work, would further prepare students for effective interdisciplinary practice.

The students participating this year at the St. Cloud site are enrolled either in a leadership course at the university or a medical-surgical course at the technical college.

Wilcox said Central Lakes College, which has both an LPN and associate degree RN program, will use the same scenarios in their simulation experience in May.

As stipulated in the grant, the laboratory experiences are being recorded and added to a digital library to be accessed by other programs around the state.

“We will also be sharing our experiences and our results through regional, state and national conferences that are looking for presentations on innovative use of simulation learning,” she said.

For more information about the Healthcare Education Industry Partnership, go online to www.heip.org.

Nursing Nibs

- SCSU’s accelerated nursing program began its first classes in August 2006 with six students. The 16-month program for college graduates blends classroom instruction, online courses, simulated learning, laboratory and clinical practice as preparation for licensure as registered nurses.
- All 37 traditional-program nursing students who graduated in 2006 passed the exam for licensure as registered nurses.



Senior RN student Gregory Gavin, left, advises a patient’s father, portrayed by Mark Rammel, a student LPN.

Sponsored by the College of Social Sciences, the Health Care Career Fair is an opportunity to explore career options and make contact with employers offering internship and fulltime opportunities. This is a free event and no registration is required.

Social Sciences & Health Care Career Fair



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