Using “Action Methods” to Enhance Role-Play Simulations in Teaching Communication Skills (P17)

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Objectives
- Discuss how to prepare a group for role-plays using sociodramatic warm-up exercises that are designed to enhance spontaneity and the creativity necessary for role-plays to be successful.
- Recognize how to use these warm-up exercises interactively to guide the selection of cases for role-play from those you are teaching.
- Apply one or two techniques that you learned to your teaching.
- Demonstrate how to debrief learners using sharing and reflection.

Communication skills are a core competency in clinical care, and role play is an important method for teaching communication skills using simulation. However, many teachers have experienced resistance and reluctance on the part of learners to participate in this method of learning. In this workshop, we will demonstrate methods for enhancing role-plays, generating enthusiasm on the part of learners, increasing their involvement, and making teaching and learning more enjoyable. Specifically we will show a model for enlivening role-plays called “empathy in action.” It borrows from psychodrama and sociodrama in that it uses specific “action methods” to create learner-centered, interactive, experiential scenarios in which learners provide the material for role-plays and participate in the enactments. These methods include the following:

1. Warm-up exercises—We recognize that role-plays often fail because learners are anxious and not ready to assume the role they may asked to take, so they are unable to be spontaneous and creative in portraying characters such as patients, family members, and providers. Warm-up exercises “loosen up” the group, preparing them for an enactment that generates “themes” or “challenges” (such as giving bad news to young people with a serious disease).

2. Leading the group in creating characters for the enactment and assigning them names, genders, and other characteristics.
3. Using the group in “doubling,” or becoming the alter ego of characters (patients, family members, etc.) who will be portrayed, thus revealing hidden thoughts and feelings.
4. Conducting the role play, including incorporating teaching points.
5. Sharing of experiences among the role-players and audience. We have conducted workshops using these methods for clinicians in the United States and abroad and published a number of papers describing their use. In demonstrating these techniques, we will walk the participants through the methodology and provide time for questions and interaction.