



Transforming professional performance through the power of human interaction

Starting an SP Program from (Nearly) Scratch

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I began my career in academic medicine about seven years ago, and (lucky for me!) got my start in a simulation program in an undergraduate medical education setting. I went on to work for a hospital-based Simulation Center, and about two years ago began a new job at a new institution. While my current role does not focus solely on simulation-based education, it does fall under my purview and so I've found myself in the exciting and daunting position of building an SP Program from (nearly) scratch. I say nearly, as there were simulation activities in the medical school curricula before my arrival, but the methodology was quite a bit different from my previous experience. Since that time, the SP-based activities have grown exponentially for students, to the point where it is now a significant component of the pre-clerkship curriculum and an expanding component in the clerkship curriculum. Now that some time has gone by, there are some lessons I've learned that I'd like to share.

First, communicating the education theory underpinnings to why we do things the way we do is extremely important. This seems obvious, but I may have become de-sensitized to the complexity of executing simulations after being in field for a while. For me, some decisions seem obvious while for faculty new to human-based simulation, some discussion might be warranted. When I proposed a plan for executing a simulation, there were many, many best practices that went into each component, but all the links to theory were not necessarily explicit.

Second, the budget we estimated was too conservative, even for a pilot. We wanted to begin small and gradually expand, and while that is what we did, people became very excited once simulations were really underway and wanted to add to the plan. My institution luckily had the flexibility to do that, but in a different circumstance we would have needed some "thinking room," given the newness of the program.

Third, I've been challenged to think outside the box and not simply execute a "this is how it's done" approach. It would be relatively straightforward to replicate common practices, and at times that's what I've been tempted to do in order to get things done efficiently. Having a literally blank slate has allowed me to challenge my own ideas, question why things "have to be" a certain way. For

example, I'm familiar with a fairly standardized formula for encounters, which after many executions can feel a little like "rinse and repeat" (and may even feel that way to students). However because my current institution has a bevy of behavioral scientists available to teach, they've become a much more present component of the curriculum than I would have thought to try, having not been familiar with that kind of resource in the past.

Thus far this has been an eye-opening experience for me. In my job, one of the things I was least concerned about was beginning the SP-based activities, given my previous experience. I realize now that starting something from scratch always offers new opportunities and challenges.