INTRODUCTION

Simulation is ubiquitous in medical education, however there has been little research into the authenticity of simulations. Research in other professions shows actors interact differently than the participants they are portraying. That is, there are interactional differences in simulated and actual consultations.

AIM

This project was designed to understand what, if any differences there are between real surgeon-patient and simulated surgeon-actor consultations. By doing so, we can then investigate how authenticity might be improved in simulation training in medicine. In this small study, we focused on the problem presentation. This is the primary point of patient agency within a consultation where the patient has the greatest ability to participate in and direct the interaction.

APPROACH

To analyse interaction in such detail, we used the qualitative methodology of conversation analysis (CA). CA is the micro-analysis of talk using video recordings of interactions which are then transcribed to allow for focussed analysis. As this is a small study, we chose a single case analysis study design, which uses a small number of cases to understand how participants co-construct the interactions. Two simulated consultations were recorded for this study and four real consultations were analysed, collected for a previous study.

FINDINGS

Through this analysis, we found that actors in these simulated consultations presented their problems differently than the patients in naturally occurring consultations in the following ways:

- how the problem is presented
- the way the transition to history taking is managed
- how they justify the visit

SO WHAT?

Training and assessment in medical education depends on reliability and validity of simulation, which is seen to be a reflection of ‘real world’ scenarios. This research highlights issues of authenticity in simulated doctor-patient interactions that have been previously unexplored.

References

Justifying the visit

In primary care, patients justify the visit to demonstrate that they are reasonable and have a doctorable problem. Compared to primary care consultations, patients in surgical visits do less interactional work to account for or justify the visit, and this was seen in the naturally occurring data in this study. The actors in this data oriented to the interactional norms for primary care visits, demonstrating that they are reasonable patients in particular by designing their problem presentations as “troubles-resistant” and with some diagnostic claims rather than invoking third parties, which previous research as shown is a more common way of accounting for the visit in referred consultation.

WHAT NEXT?

The next steps for this project are to re-engage with the actors involved and show them the videos and the comparison to allow them to reflect on difference. This will also allow the team to ask the actors how best to use these findings to enhance scenario development and actor preparation. To disseminate these findings and to seek external feedback, the authors presented the work at two international conferences in June and July 2015 and have co-authored a paper which will be published in the Australian Journal of Linguistics in 2016.

In order to extend these findings, the team, in conjunction with the School of Medicine Sydney at The University of Notre Dame Australia, is commencing a project on medical student interactions and a slightly larger data set. These two projects will then inform a broader learning and teaching study. This future study will be designed to enhance our understanding of the impact of authenticity of simulation on learning in clinical communication education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is funded through the Innovation and Scholarship Program and Extension Program, Macquarie University. The authors wish to thank Prof John Cartmill, Associate Dean, Clinical at Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences for his input, as well as Dean Thompson and Erin Lynch who have worked as research assistants on this project.

Contact:
Dr Sarah J White
sarah.white@mq.edu.au
0403961444