Looking From Within – In-House Standardized Patients for Communication Skills Training

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Background

The Centre for Resident and Faculty Development (CRAFD) has been organising role-play based Communication Skills workshops for residents since 2011 with an average of 15 runs per year. The objectives of the workshop are to equip residents with skills to better handle communication with the patients, which ultimately will increase patients’ satisfaction rate and reduce cases of patient complaint. To date, about 1,200 residents have undergone such a training workshop. Running a workshop each time requires 4 different standardised patients (SPs) as educational aid, but there is only a small pool of about 6 external SPs for CRAFD to tap on. Each SP is also paid $100 of service fee for each session they are engaged, incurring up to $6,000 of SP fees per year.

To sustain the training needs of residents, as well as to build capability from within, it was necessary to develop our own SingHealth staff to step up as SPs, to be part of the training. This initiative not only aims to increase the pool of SPs, but also aims to save cost of engaging external SPs.

Methodology

In 2016, CRAFD initiated to conceptualise an in-house SP Training Programme to train administrative staff as SPs. Health professionals across the disciplines (doctor, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, medical social workers, and administrators) came together to co-develop and implement the training programme. The inaugural programme consists of 2 half-day training sessions delivered through large group didactics and small group role-plays. 16 administrators from Education entities attended.

Results

The trained staff were gradually deployed in the Communication Skills workshop as SPs from 2016. Although external SPs are still engaged for the Communication Skills workshops, but the need to rely on them totally has greatly reduced as internal staff ramping up their participation in 2017. Post workshop evaluation ratings by residents showed no difference in the quality of the training whether external or internal SPs are used. As a result of the new model of staging internal staff as SPs, GME saved $1,300 in 2016 and will save a total cost of $1,400 in 2017.

6 external SPs

18 internal & external SPs

Previous model
Trained 1,200 residents
SP Cost: $60,000

New model
Trains 1,200 residents
Potential Savings: $30,000

A year later, CRAFD again collaborated with trainers from allied health (occupational therapist & medical social worker) to organise a Community of Practice (CoP) session – SP Reunion, for internal SPs to share their experience. A survey administered showed that of all who responded, the staff have increased confidence and personal satisfaction as SPs.

Survey Questions and Average Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before Training</th>
<th>After Training</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the role of SP</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can confidently simulate a patient with medical condition</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can give feedback in the capacity of a patient</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested to be an SP</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel satisfied being able to contribute as an SP</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion and recommendations

To meet the aim of sustaining residents’ training needs with internal capability instead of depending on paid, external SPs, CRAFD has successfully trained internal staff who are willing to volunteer their time and effort for improving medical education with the implementation of the inaugural SP Training Programme. Additionally, this initiative has enabled cost savings, increased the pool size of SPs, and also enriched staff’s work experience.