

Great Training Assistants

An Appreciation to the Standardized-patient Volunteers

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“For optimum performance in our assumed roles, we spend a great deal of time on patient simulations. We consult, observe, and correct one another to achieve perfection and to present quality performance from beginning to end. We expect our performance to be flawless because this is the first new nursing staff exam using standardized patients. Therefore, any mistake will not only jeopardize the examinees but also invite skepticism in the training of standardized patients for all these years.”

-- Standardized patient volunteer Yi-Wei Tsai

Volunteers Role-play as Patients

In achieving the four Tzu Chi's missions, volunteers give without asking for anything in return. Their genial attitudes make people feel calm and at ease as if their own loved ones were around. Among them are a group of medical volunteers willing to play the roles of patients as part of the medical curriculum. Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital nursing department has even applied the OSCE (Objective Structured

Clinical Examination) test to its new staff training; three of the stations are set for standardized patients. That is how these standardized patient volunteers were introduced to the department. Earlier there were some worries that the volunteers might not meet the demand of nursing training because their experiences were mainly built on the training of physicians. However, the worries prove to be unnecessary after the department becomes more familiar with the standardized patient volunteers.

Not Only Good but Also Real

Head nurse Ru-Ping Chiang who is in charge of Employing Standardized Patient Training recalls, "I first met them in a standardized patient workshop in Taipei. They worked very hard on simulating patients. I was really touched seeing them pay so much attention to the details and repeating the simulations over and over only for us to learn. To my surprise, when the nursing department called the standardized patient center for help, the same brothers and sisters from Taipei came to act as our standardized patients. We felt

a warm connection. Also, these volunteers would initiate thoughtful questions: What's the difference between nursing staff training and physicians training? What's the goal of this training?"

Every standardized patient must undergo strict training, including disease symptoms described by physicians, body and facial movements instructed by professional directors and new try-outs each time new lesson case surfaces.

Our lesson plans are based on existing standardized patient disease history plus objectives of individual test stations; we feel our pre-test is pretty inclusive. But the volunteers still drill on, asking, "I

After the OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination), standardized-patient volunteers provide new caretakers with constructive feedback and encouragement. This group photo taken after OSCE.





As you can see, although they are volunteers, participants in the standardized patient program take their duties seriously. They pay close attention to all the details, obtain necessary medical knowledge, and play out the scenarios naturally and consistently in hopes of giving the best assistance possible to contribute to dynamic healthcare education.


deliberately do not answer and I challenge students when they have questions about admissions evaluation so that you can test nursing staff's clinical response when they're collecting data..." This demanding and vigorous attitude inspires us to learn more and to make some timely minor adjustments.

Self Expectation on Standardization and Peer Review

The pioneer standardized patient volunteers include Yi-Wei Tsai, Wen-Chun Kuan, Wen-Ta Wang, Huang-Pin Chien,

and Mang-Yuan Li. I remember the first day of OSCE upon their arrival at the teaching quarters. Someone remarked, "For only three standardized stations, how come there are so many people here?"

The challenges of being a standardized-patient volunteer were soon realized after a short interaction with them. For example, the first clinical exam involved a portrayal of a patient who coughed three times. Aside from self-imposed portrayal consistency, the standardized-patient volunteer's articulation was broadcasted live and monitored by other volunteers in the standardized patient program office. Other volunteers



watched the broadcast to evaluate whether the portrayal of the symptoms met the standardization requirements and how the volunteer interacted with the healthcare professionals taking the exam. The volunteers would also exchange feedback after the exam. These duties also explained why extra standardized-patient volunteers were needed to be sure others could take breaks. As mentioned by volunteer Yi-Wei, “the commitment of a standardized-patient volunteer includes approaching the training gingerly with a sincere and humble learning attitude.” For this, I was genuinely inspired.

Experienced Volunteers Helping New Standardized-Patients

Another impressive moment was witnessing a more experienced standardized-patient volunteer guiding a new volunteer throughout the clinical exam to help the new volunteer better portray the physical and emotional characteristics of a patient. Their professionalism was evident in their mentoring and continual teaching of the new volunteers.

After the exam, standardized-patient volunteers also provided oral feedback to the healthcare professionals. Yi-Wei Tsai suggested, “When administering pills, it would be a considerate gesture if you could also offer them a glass of water for the medication. At that time, if they have any questions about the drug, you would

also be able to answer. If you have doubts, a quick check with the computer system would ensure accuracy and establish patient’s confidence in the caretakers.” He further mentioned, “You should always make the patient feel at ease. Some fresh-out-of-school care staff seem nervous and forgets the proper procedures when faced with a realistic setting. As much as I want to help, I held back since this is a qualifying exam. I had to let them complete the processes themselves.” This shows how much our standardize-patient volunteers want the new staff to improve.

“The second exam followed the same process as the first, but after two months of clinical practice, everyone showed great progress in their interactions with the patients and clinical procedures, which is something worth applauding. I wish all the healthcare professionals the best. Lastly, I must thank the nursing department for giving the standardized-patient volunteers this opportunity to contribute and increase their skills.” This was Brother Tsai’s written feedback to everyone. He not only contributed his time but also turned around to thank others. It truly exemplifies the principle and mission of Tzu Chi volunteers.

They were the best learning models for standardized-patients; much appreciation goes out to those volunteers who quietly assisted in the nursing educational training by being standardized-patient volunteers.