The Impact of Volunteering in a Poverty Simulation on Attitudes Toward Poverty

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Background

Poverty simulations have been shown to be effective in helping participating health care professionals change their attitudes and awareness of the challenges faced by those living in poverty. Volunteers in poverty simulations have not been extensively studied in the past but provide an interesting subject as volunteers have a different experience and interaction with learners during the simulation than actual learners. By studying the changes in perspectives of the volunteers, we can better understand the effectiveness of the simulation for all involved and potentially adjust volunteer training and simulation experience to maximize the benefits of the simulation.

Methods

• During the 2017/2018 academic year, the Office of Interprofessional Simulation (OIPS) sponsored and facilitated nine iterations of the poverty simulation.
• Each simulation accommodated 80 learners and 25 volunteers. The volunteers acted as service providers (day care workers, employment office personnel, etc).
• The volunteers included students, faculty, and staff from across campus and throughout the health system including medicine, nursing, and social work.
• Data was collected through a pre-post evaluation survey which assessed three learning outcomes:
  • Critical thinking about poverty
  • The ability to relate to the experiences and perspectives of people living in poverty
  • Contributions to future views about poverty based on their participation in the simulation

Results/Discussion

Volunteer Demographics

Evaluation Comments

Things that were different as a volunteer compared to a learner...
• “I had more of an opportunity to hear some of the situations and circumstances that impact peoples’ lives”
• “[the simulation] gave insights in how the provider may feel and react to another person’s actions due to stress”

How this experience will benefit the volunteer’s future practice...
• “I plan to do more outreach to help those that can’t afford medical care”
• “I will use this experience to help me understand the complexities that individuals faces as a result of adverse conditions in life”

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to compare attitude changes in poverty simulation volunteers after the simulation.

Conclusions

• Volunteering in poverty simulations provided a unique opportunity to observe and expand understanding of the effects of poverty, which will help the volunteers deal with the challenges they will face in their careers.
• Additional development and validation of tools to assess attitude changes may be useful to continue evaluating and improving poverty simulations.
• Future directions may include comparing attitude changes in volunteers compared to participants, and assessing long term follow-up of impact in providers in their clinical care settings.