

## **Our experience as simulated patients during communication skills learning and assessment**

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### **Dear Editor,**

Simulated or standardized patients offer students the opportunity to practice communication skills and in many cases they also provide feedback to students to improve learning.<sup>1</sup>

At the Manipal College of Medical Sciences (MCOMS), Pokhara, the Department of Pharmacology has been teaching and assessing students in communication skills (CS) for more than 7 years. We (Sudesh Gyawali and Durga Bista) joined the institution for the two-year MSc Pharmacology course. One day Dr. Ravi Shankar broached the subject of simulated patient role-play to us and we were very enthusiastic. Our role-play was directed towards making the undergraduate medical (MBBS) students visualize an image of a patient, his/her motives, needs and requirements. We wanted to emphasize to the students, the effect of disease on the daily lives of the patients, the need to remain updated with recent developments and encapsulate the points the doctor has to communicate to the patient.

We were simulated patients during CS assessment during the university and semester examinations. During one of the sessions I (SG) was a rich businessman fond of sweets and suffering from type 2 diabetes and I discussed with the students the life style modifications as part of my treatment. Missing out on sweets like 'raas malai' and 'chamcham' was a big blow. During another role

play I (DB) was a young mother of a two-year old child suffering from acute gastroenteritis, the wife of a small farmer in Tanahun district.

We came to know about the attitude, knowledge and capacity of the students to apply their skill and knowledge in the context of South Asia. Our MBBS students after receiving the training will be better communicators in their future practice.

In many cases the patient may not understand the doctor's advice properly. He may not be aware about the dose, indications, side effects and contraindications. Often patients discontinue therapy on noticing minor side effects leading to therapeutic failure.

I (PRS) believe that role-play as simulated patients will help the PG students to be more closely involved in CS training and will help them initiate and conduct similar sessions in future. We (SG and DB) aim to be involved as PG students' in future departmental initiatives like teaching the ethical dimensions of medical practice and the doctor-patient relationship.

### **References**

1. Wind LA, Van Dalen J, Muijtjens AM, Rethans JJ. Assessing simulated patients in an educational setting: the MaSP (Maastricht Assessment of Simulated Patients). *Medical Education* 2004;38:39-44.