Impact of Emotionally-Complex Roles on HIV-Related Simulated Patients

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Background: Simulated patients (SPs) have participated successfully in medical education for over four decades. SPs portraying stressful situations may feel immediate psychological or physiological effects that can even remain for several days after the performance. Long-term effects have not been studied.

Work done: This study explored the emotional and physical effects, and changes in attitudes and behaviours among 10 SPs who performed in an HIV-related Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), and also, its relationship with the complexity of the interpreted role. Three different roles were classified as having low, medium and high complexity.

Questionnaires with open-ended questions were answered immediately after the OSCE and one year later. In addition, a focus group was conducted also a year later. Conclusions/Take-home messages: Interpreting a role can produce emotional, behavioral and physical effects in SPs, in different moments: during the training for the performance, immediately after, or it can have a long-term impact on the SPs perception of his/her personal health and health risk. Medium and high complexity roles performed by SPs produce more and longer effects, especially those that deal with sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS. SPs need support from the health educators who work with them.

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