

Introduction & Aims

The practice in healthcare demands excellent communication, intellect, and interpersonal skills in order to respond effectively in unpredictable situations while interacting with a wide variety of individuals. Medical Improv is an emerging field in which the principles and training techniques of improvisational theater are used to improve spontaneous thinking, communication, and teamwork in the practice of medicine. Improvisational skills have a substantial overlap with those required of clinicians. The main principles of the discipline include empathy, adaptability, collaboration, and skilled listening. The aims of this project were to use the principles and techniques of improvisational theater to foster:

- Cognitive capacity and flexibility needed to evaluate and acquire reliable clinical information
- Ability to actively and generously observe and listen to another
- Ability to communicate empathically with others in order to create an environment in which she or he feels safe, satisfied and heard

The goal is to offer 6 to 8 free workshops yearly over two years.

Methods

Students participated in improv exercises that coached specific skill sets:

- Collaborating with patients and team members
- Adjusting to the needs of the patient
- Practicing emotional awareness
- Portraying varied social status

Participants were encouraged to provide post-session feedback to assess how they have applied what they have learned in their practice:

- Impact on communication skills
- Confidence in patient interactions
- Relevance to clinical practice
- Contribution to enjoyment of the session

Participants

160 participants total attended 13 workshops: 115 students and 36 faculty and staff. Nine participants fell outside of these 3 groups.

Participants were from multiple disciplines and schools including medicine, physician assistant program, nursing, physical therapy, and divinity. They serve in various roles in the Duke Healthcare system.

Roles in Duke Healthcare System



Qualitative Results

“These workshops should be part of the standard education for medical and nursing students.”

“Everything we worked on translates directly to medical communication. I plan to start using a lot of these exercises with our nurse residents.”

“The improv is so different than classical medical training - makes you more conscious of how you might potentially impact patients, families and coworkers. Great for team building. Wonderful supplement to having to know everything, being part of a rigid hierarchy, and attempting rapport and communication.”

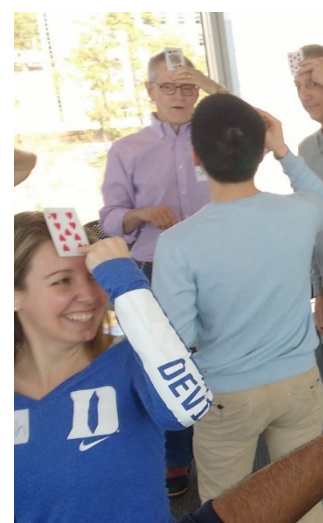


“I would recommend this workshop to everybody working in the healthcare.”

“I think that doing improv forced me to engage in conversations where I cannot predict what is going to happen, and showed me that I can actually enjoy that atmosphere even though I am always hesitant about it at the beginning. I think this translates to an ability to find satisfaction in unpredictable patient conversations instead of dreading them.”

“It was such a fun departure from my classes and clinical rotation. I would

REALLY appreciate this class being offered as part of our Professional Communication curriculum. I think that all students would benefit from taking a couple of these classes.”



“...communication is skill that can be and needs to be practiced and also reflected upon; improv is one way to become more comfortable in these situations.”

“The equality of participants (despite our different positions in the medical school/hospital hierarchy outside of the experience) was a great tool for exploring new ways of communicating and building community.”

Medical Improv Leaders

Raymond Barfield - Director, Medical Humanities, Trent Center for Bioethics, Humanities & History of Medicine

Lynn Bowlby - Associate Professor of Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine

J Chachula – Assistant Instructor

Saumil Chudgar - Director, Undergraduate Medical Education, Department of Medicine

Brandon Holmes – Assistant Instructor

Dan Sipp - Standardized Patient Training Coordinator

Elizabeth Ross - Associate Consulting Professor, Doctor of Physical Therapy Division

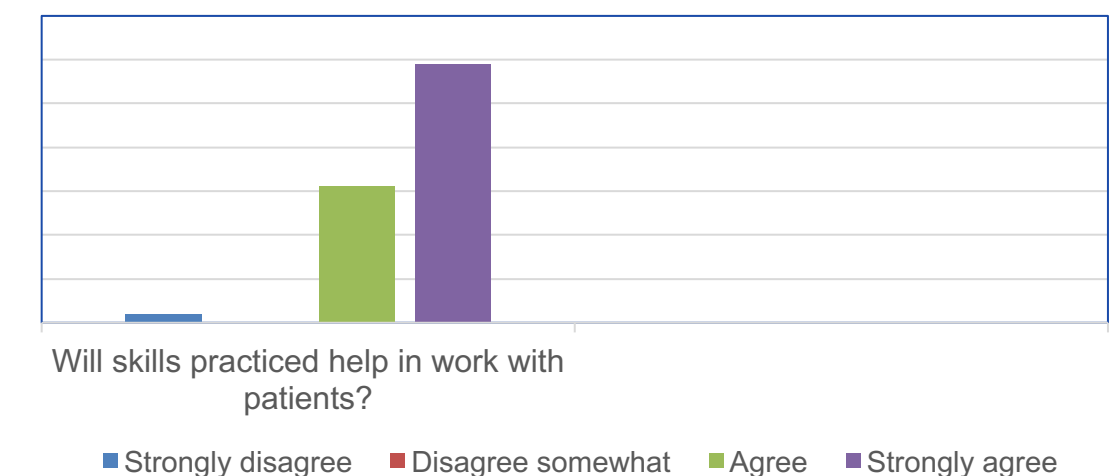
Impact

There was an 80% response rate to the surveys on the day of the workshop and one month later.

Participants responded to questions including:

Do you feel that the skills you practiced in today’s workshop will help you in your work with patients?

Impact on Work with Patients



Significance

- Because of the success of these workshops, and the positive feedback we received from participants, we have planned another 6 to 8 workshops for the upcoming year.
- We are working with residency leaders to develop a series of weekend conferences for residents, incorporating Medical Improv to address ongoing issues of burnout and patient satisfaction.
- Based on local success, we invited leaders in Medical Improv from around the country to Duke for the first national consortium aimed at providing resources and training for other institutions that are interested in incorporating Medical Improv into clinician training.