The Role of Improvisation in Osteopathic Medical Education
Objectives

• Discuss the need and rationale for theatre improvisation in the medical school curriculum.

• Discuss the student benefits of learning how to perform the medical interview and to be able to be malleable with the patient interview utilizing improvisation.

• Discuss the improvisation techniques utilized in the medical classroom.

• Provide experiences in theatre improvisation to improve listening and observation skills.

• Discuss the value of theatre improvisation as it relates to spontaneous response.
In what ways are theatre improvisation and doctoring similar?
Background

• “Improvisation” has been defined as intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way. (Berk and Trieber, 2009).
• A handful of medical schools across the country have implemented Improvisation into the medical school curriculum.
• Improvisation is a conversation skill that, like other social and interactive skills, can be taught. (Berk and Trieber, 2009).
• Improvisational skills optimize communication with patients during medical encounters and impart valuable skills essential to providing empathetic, supportive patient-centered care. (Shochet, et al., 2013)
• Physicians are regularly surprised by concerns raised by patients such that they must be adept at improvising. (Shochet, et al., 2013)
• Improvisation can promote spontaneity, intuition, interactivity, inductive discovery, attentive listening, nonverbal communication, as-libbing, creativity, and critical thinking. (Berk and Trieber, 2009).
Rationale for incorporating Improvisation into the medical classroom:

- Build effective interpersonal communication skills
- Improve bedside manner
- Improve ability to think on one’s feet
- Increase rapport
- Decrease awkward silences
- Students act with patients, have to pass Physical Exam portion of boards
Skills learned by students through improvisation:

• Physically explore ways to improve empathetic response and increase humanistic awareness within the patient encounter
• Active learning
• Reading body language
• Responding appropriately to unexpected situations
Survey says:

In a survey given to the second year medical students at Rowan-SOM:

• 92% of students stated that they had little or no experience with improvisation.
• 80% of the students indicated that the Improvisation Seminar was either helpful or very helpful in improving their ability to communicate effectively.
• 29% percent of the students stated that they thought the techniques they learning in the seminar would be very helpful.
• 49% of the students thought that the techniques they learned in the seminar would be somewhat helpful as they began their training and seeing patients in the office setting.
## Translation to Standardized Patient Lab Scores

### Medical Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>AY2013-2014 (n=122)</th>
<th>AY2014-2015 (n=123)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal communication strength: enhancing rather than detracting</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of words undignified or unsuitable for patient age/station</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Choices: Avoidance of unexplained medical jargon</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic behavior in response to a patient concern or issue</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Translation to Standardized Patient Lab Scores
Challenging/Difficult Patient

- Nonverbal communication enhancing rather than detracting
  - AY2013-2014 (n=122): 96.1%
  - AY2014-2015 (n=123): 95.1%

- Customer Service: message neither defensive nor dismissive of patient complaints
  - AY2013-2014 (n=122): 89.9%
  - AY2014-2015 (n=123): 96.7%

- Allowed patient to express self with little interruption
  - AY2013-2014 (n=122): 92.8%
  - AY2014-2015 (n=123): 99.2%

- Appearance: confidence/capability/comfort through encounter
  - AY2013-2014 (n=122): 87.6%
  - AY2014-2015 (n=123): 88.6%

- PEARLS of patient care worked gracefully into conversation
  - AY2013-2014 (n=122): 83%
  - AY2014-2015 (n=123): 85.4%
Techniques:

• Physical Warm Up
• Name Game
• Zip, Zap, Zop
• Yes, and...
• Conflict Resolution Scenario
Physical Warm Up / Name Game

• Opens the mind and body for creative and spontaneous action
• Develops awareness of the group, builds trust and multitasking skills
• Encourages playful game interaction in preparation for improvisation
Zip, Zap, Zop

• Builds energy, focus, listening and responding skills
Yes, and...

• Develops affirmative listening and responding skills, working from the imagination in playful interaction
Conflict Resolution Scenario

• Develops observations skills and spontaneous listening and responding skills in an acting situation
Conclusion

• Reflections on the workshop experience, thoughts about value of theatre improvisation in the medical curriculum moving forward.
References

• Shochet, R. et al. “‘Thinking on my feet’: an improvisation course to enhance students’ confidence and responsiveness in the medical interview.” *Educ Prim Care*, Feb 2013; 24(2): 199-24.


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