



# The value of actors to teambuilding and development of the primary healthcare team

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## Background

Actors have been used for many years in the training and assessment of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, especially in relation to the development of communication skills. This project builds on earlier work<sup>[1,2]</sup> and uses actors to help develop the skills of members of the wider primary care team.

## Aim

The aim of the training was to give the 'front of house' primary care team experience in dealing with challenging patient encounters, to test out their response to situations that might become an emergency, and to allow time to discuss issues arising from the scenarios.

## What we did

A 'high impact' training session was developed, to be delivered in participating general practices, over one hour. The parameters of the session were well-defined, in that it needed to run in the working environment of the participants to ensure relevance to their experience of interacting with patients and it needed to be integrated into a working day, to minimise the disruption to patients.

The number of participants attending the sessions ranged from eight in smaller practices to upwards of twenty in larger ones. Participants were generally representative of practice nursing and administrative staff, with some participation by doctors. In addition to the practice staff present, there were also three or four actors in attendance and a facilitator to run the session.

In the hour the group aimed to cover three short role-play scenarios, as well as having time for a facilitated discussion to debrief and identify further learning needs. The scenarios focused on the actors playing patients, but also involved members of staff attending the session. Scenarios concerned:

- A patient, whose first language is not English, having difficulties in understanding the appointment system;
- A couple whose conversation turns into an argument; and
- A patient whose behaviour in the waiting room may give cause for concern.

The running of each scenario was pro-actively managed by the facilitator and actors: the facilitator was able to pause action, open up the role-play for discussion and swap the practice staff taking part. The actors were able to turn up or down the 'volume' of the action of the scenario, depending on the reaction of the staff.

## Evaluation

Observational data was collected at a sample of sessions (n.2), along with oral and written feedback from participants from all training events (n.12) over a year. The data were analysed to provide an evaluation of the usefulness of the approach and more detail about the process, and in particular:

- What were the views of participants regarding the relevance and usefulness of this approach to developing their skills in their working roles?
- What additional information is provided to further develop the method and process?

## What was found

Overall the session was considered to be *valuable*, *useful* and *informative* by participants, especially for:

- Time to reflect on communication skills and to share/see the approach of others;
- Appreciation of the patients' needs and experience;
- Insight into the ways different team members can work together;
- The value of role-play to this type of training (although it was felt to be uncomfortable by some);
- The significance of the role of the facilitator in making explicit the learning of the group.

## Conclusion

This was a well-received training session which has demonstrated the value of workplace training for members of the wider primary care team. Through it participants became more aware of the subtleties of communication with patients in challenging situations.

## Next steps

Participants from these sessions suggested telephone triage /communication as a further topic for training. We are continuing to work with actors to develop educational sessions and resources.

## References

1. Lyon-Maris J and Burrows P (2009) Simulating Doctors: a report on a workshop training actors to simulate General Practitioner Appraisees and General Practitioner Registrars. *Education for Primary Care* **20**: 309-313
2. Scallan S, Ball K, Lyon-Maris J, Burrows P and Gorrod E (2011) Using actors to simulate doctors in the continuing professional development of GP trainers and appraisers. *Education for Primary Care* **22**: 171-177

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