Simulated clients in final year dental rotations

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Introduction

• Students in the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) spend a significant portion of their time in the first three years learning about clinical communication in simulated client experiences. In the final year of their studies, there is no formal communications component.

• Hoezer et al., (2015) found that the use of simulation encourages active learning where students can experience challenging client-patient scenarios. Standardized clients are routinely leveraged in simulated communication scenarios in many veterinary curricula, including at UCVM. Adams and Kurtz (2006) insist that communication cannot be taught as a ‘hit and run’ approach but rather must be viewed as ‘helical’ with continual reinforcement.

• UCVM dental final year rotations are ‘blended’ including cadaver laboratories, lectures, and live animal cases. The live animals in these cases are not accompanied by a client or owner. Student evaluations of such rotations have reflected the lack of opportunity for interaction with clients.

The purpose of the study was to determine if the use of simulated clients in dental cases, where the owner is absent, enriched communication experiences in final year dental rotations.

Methods

• Two final year dental rotations provided the opportunity for each student in the rotation to interact with simulated clients while diagnosing and treating dental patients.

  Small animal (2015): UCVM owned animals – 7 students
  Equine (2016): UCVM owned and non-profit organizations’ horses - 9 students

• Students were anonymously and randomly assigned into the each following treatment groups during three dental cases:

  Group Treatment
  A Medical record for the patient only (no simulated client interaction) and clinical post-procedure rounds
  B History & admitting interaction with simulated client, and rounds
  C History & admitting interaction with simulated client, rounds, and patient discharge interaction with simulated client

• Medical records were provided for each patient regardless of treatment group

• Students anonymously completed brief pre-procedure, post-procedure, and post-interaction surveys. Simulated clients completed a feedback form after each interaction.

Results

Small Animal Rotation (July 2015):

• Two thirds of the students felt that they would like to have more opportunity to work with simulated clients for admissions and discharges.

• The use of the simulated clients revealed that students lacked ability to adequately obtain informed consent and discuss costs related to dental procedures.

• Students did not recognize the information in patient’s medical records as part of the patient history.

Equine Rotation (June 2016):

• Students during the equine rotation had a much better understanding and ability to obtain informed consent from the simulated client, however, they felt very uneasy discussing financial aspects of the dentistry.

• During the interactions, the students did not ask the client about their prior knowledge or how in depth they would like the dentistry descriptions. Omitting this key communication skill resulted in many cases to assumptions of prior client knowledge or extended descriptions of procedures that were not required. Two students also noted in their survey that the simulated clients did not have enough understanding of equine dentistry to allow a good interaction.

• During Group A (no simulated client) cases, students did not feel that their confidence related to communication of dental procedure, financial costs or follow up owner care were enhanced. This highlights students’ learning compartmentalization – either procedural or communication.

• Most students identified in all three experiences that they do not feel adequately prepared to formulate a discharge plan for equine dental patients.

Equine and Small Animal Combined:

• Forty-four percent of students inadvertently self-identified as unconscious incompetents in clinical communication when they commented that they did not feel the need for more client interactions and the correlating feedback from the simulated clients indicated that those students displayed the most need for improvement.

Surveys

Conclusions

• By utilizing simulated clients to enrich owner-absent clinical dental cases, some areas of communication weakness in the curriculum were identified including: obtaining informed consent and discussing costs of the procedure.

• Explaining the procedure and treatment options to the simulated client gave students a the opportunity to become more confident in their own knowledge and procedural skills.

• The helical approach of teaching communication skills in final year rotations is important in the veterinary curriculum. While this would ideally occur in real life appointments or farm calls with real patients, the use of simulated clients in owner absent cases provides a viable alternative.

• The unique combination of client simulation, real cases, and reflective surveys allowed instructors to identify the students’ stage of communication competence and self-awareness of their skills.

References:


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