



Position Statement on Use of Virtual Simulation during the Pandemic

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Synopsis

The International Nursing Association of Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL, www.inacsl.org) and the Society for Simulation in Healthcare (SSH, www.ssih.org) support the use of virtual simulation as a replacement for clinical hours for students currently enrolled in health sciences professions (i.e. nursing students, medical students) during the current public health crisis caused by COVID-19.

The Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic is currently affecting over 80 countries and has spread throughout every state in the United States.¹ Countries including China, Italy, United States, Spain, Germany, Iran, and France are some of the highest affected facing challenges of treating thousands of patients that exceed health system capacity.² With global shortages in personal protective equipment, many healthcare professionals are becoming ill with the virus themselves leading to current shortages of healthcare professionals on the front lines.^{3, 4}

With the pandemic expected to surge in waves and last for months, it is critical that the pipeline of educating healthcare professionals remains intact. Universities across the world have transitioned to continuing education through online or virtual means. In the context of health professions education, many regulatory bodies (such as state boards of nursing) require completion of a set number of hours within the clinical setting. For example, in California⁵, thousands of nursing students who planned to graduate in a couple of months are being blocked due to this clinical hour requirement. While policymakers in Texas⁶ and New York⁷ have readily promoted policy change to assist with the educational challenges related to COVID-19 in the interest of helping needed healthcare workers graduate, other regulatory agencies have remained firm.

The Resolution

The professional organizations of INACSL and SSH encompass the world's leading experts in simulation-based education for healthcare providers. We can attest that virtual simulation has been used for over a decade successfully. Further, research has repeatedly demonstrated that use of virtual simulation - simulated healthcare experiences on one's computer - is an effective teaching method that results in improved student learning outcomes.^{8, 9} **Based on the current and anticipated shortage of healthcare workers, we propose that regulatory bodies and policymakers demonstrate flexibility by allowing the replacement of clinical hours usually completed in a healthcare setting with that of virtually simulated experiences during the pandemic.** By supporting this innovative yet effective way of teaching as a solution to address the clinical hour shortage of health professions students, education efforts will continue seamlessly, and we will support timely career progression of healthcare providers needed immediately to battle COVID-19.

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