

Abstract Title:

The use of simulations in dietetic education programs: A literature review

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Objectives: The aim was to review published studies on the use of simulations as a teaching and assessment method in undergraduate or graduate dietetic education programs.

Methods: MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL and Education Source databases were searched (February 2016) with the keywords simulation or [standardized or simulated] patient or “objective structured clinical exam”, and [diet or nutrition] student or intern or education or program. The search was limited to articles published 1990-2016 in English or French. Selection criteria included: articles on all types of simulations, nutrition/dietetic students/interns and any type of research.

Results: Fifty of 276 articles were selected for full screening based on inclusion criteria. Those studies revealed that various types of simulations are used as a teaching method in dietetic programs. Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) have been researched the most (n=10). This may be explained by the utilization of OSCEs in other health disciplines such as medicine and nursing. Furthermore, the use of standardized patients was the second most frequent type of simulations reported (n=8). Eleven out of fourteen studies that evaluated student’s satisfaction regarding simulations reported that they were perceived as a valuable learning experience. Simulations in dietetic programs were mostly used to practice communication and counselling techniques. In most studies, except OSCEs, the assessment of the learning experiences was based on students’ perspective and not on the measurement of competency performance indicators.

Conclusion: According to these results, some dietetic programs are using simulations as part of OSCEs and/or with standardized patients. Although simulations are often being used to practice communication skills, their impact on developing competencies has yet to be documented using objective performance indicators.

Significance to the field of dietetics: It is important to understand how dietetic education programs use simulations and how they may optimise attainment of learning outcomes. (Funding: CNFS–volet Université d’Ottawa)