



CAME Voice/Voix

Standardized Patients in the training of police officers - Nancy McNaughton, Brian Simmons

Standardized patients (SPs) don't just work with medical students. The University of Toronto Standardized Patient Program (SPP) has forged a strong relationship with the Emil Kolb Peel Regional Police Training College and since 2010 have provided educational support and SPs for their weeklong continuing education mental health course. SP cases were designed in collaboration with the police faculty to meet objectives for both Use-of-Force protocols and communication. The SPP reviewed case material, advised on learning objectives and trained the SPs. Expert facilitators from SPP worked in tandem with Use-of-Force officers during simulated interactions and following in order to debrief the sessions.

Mental health training now runs four times a year with an increased number of SP scenarios. To date 714 officers, prisoner escort officers, and communicators have been trained. Recently, the Peel Police tactical unit has included the SPP in its specialized training for officers involved in high stakes negotiation and hostage taking.

Live simulation for police training is value added when compared to role-play in highly emotional situations. Scenarios are developed based on real experiences and rigorously trained. Also the stakes are higher for officers interacting with people not known to them. SP portrayals are experience-near for participants eliciting different responses than during role play. Following a simulated encounter, SPs provide feedback about their experiences according to the learning objectives while a Use-of-Force officer and communication facilitator together debrief learners on their decisions and actions; physical approach, distance, stance, weapon use, positioning and how officers communicated with each other as well as with the person in distress. Three separate but aligned observations provide rich learning.

Mental health calls for first responders are complex requiring sophisticated skills of approach, address, communication, decision making and use-of-force in quickly changing environments. Communication is deemed essential for these situations. Live simulation with SPs provides opportunities for officers to try different approaches and to receive rich and compelling feedback from everyone involved. Collaborating with the police to bring our skills to bear on important community needs has been enriching. In doing so we have learned so much.