A Day in the Life... A Practitioner-Teacher’s Approach to Simulating Practice Management

Sara Turley, MBA; Michelle Hirschman, MBA; Jeff Canar, Ph.D.
Department of Health Systems Management, College of Health Sciences, Rush University

Abstract

A practice management course aims to provide students with the real-life, hands-on exposure needed to manage an ambulatory practice. Many of the graduate students have limited work experience, and therefore, immersing them in practical, real-world simulations followed by activities helps them synthesize the learning in a valuable approach. Teacher-practitioners are uniquely well positioned to develop applied lessons that prepare students to assume a future healthcare administration role. As such, the cornerstone of this practice management course is a clinic observation in which each student spends time in an ambulatory practice observing the clinic environment in action. This observation, along with a post-observation guided classroom discussion and a written reflection, facilitates better understanding of the operational and clinical challenges faced by practice administrators.

Introduction

In order to enhance learning and prepare graduate students for a future role as a practice administrator, we have designed an observational experience intended to simulate the real-life role. This activity consists of three components, and is then leveraged throughout the remainder of the course.

Activity components:

- Students participate in an ambulatory practice observation early-on in the course. They are paired with a clinic and a practice manager, and must spend a minimum of 2 hours observing. They are given goals and objectives in advance so they know what elements they should be taking note of.
- Students are then asked to write a two-page written reflection analyzing their experience and commenting on these key elements.
- Finally, the instructors lead an in-class group discussion during which students share their experiences and learn from one another.

Implementation

A sign-up sheet is generated with observation locations and contact information. This is circulated in class and each student selects an observation practice, then coordinates the date and time directly with the practice manager.

The optimal timing of this activity is following the second class, which provides students with necessary prior information on workflows and staffing models.

The course directors play an important role in coordinating observations in advance with the practice managers.

A variety of clinic locations and specialties should be identified to allow students the opportunity to select an observation location of interest.

It is important to articulate expectations for both the students and the practice managers well in advance.

Students receive the assignment goals as well as a list of questions and items to take note of during the observation.

This guides their written reflection and helps them synthesize their observation.

Each student is asked to write a two-page written reflection analyzing their observation.

The course directors lead an in-class group discussion following the observation so students can learn from one another’s experience.

Outcomes

Student feedback has historically been very favorable with many students reporting this being their favorite assignment during the course.

Student surveys reflect high interest and satisfaction, particularly with items related to the incorporation of real-life scenarios.

The objective rated highest over the past three years is “related course material to real life situations.”

Qualitative feedback has similarly been very positive.

Select comments illustrate the sentiment that connecting concepts learned in the class to experiences outside the classroom result in a more enriching learning environment.

Implications

Teacher-Practitioners

Teacher-practitioners can play a valuable role in the design of practical simulations and hands-on learning.

Even when practitioners are not directly instructing a course, they can be engaged in the design of curriculum that emphasizes simulation of real-world experiences.

Student Experience

Incorporating these types of activities into the classroom allows for an enhanced learning experience, as well as high student satisfaction, as demonstrated in the quantitative and qualitative feedback shown.

Leveraging the Activity for Subsequent and Continued Learning

Throughout the course, students are encouraged to think about their observation experience as reference. The course instructors will often ask students to recall their practice when studying specific operational workflows, technology, or patient safety. Doing this allows for longitudinal context and seems to help students contextualize the concepts discussed in class.

Subsequent class activities can draw upon this observation. An example of another activity from this same class is provided below. During lectures, the instructors embed several “Rapid Fire” Exercises in which the students are asked to imagine themselves as practice managers and how they would respond to a given situation. Students have a couple of minutes to think about their response and then the instructors lead a five-minute discussion of potential responses, allowing multiple students to share.