

## Abstract

**Background:** Communication skills are critical for pharmacists to provide optimal patient care. Standardized patients (SPs) are individuals that assume the role of a patient in simulated scenarios to provide a standardized experience for students. SPs are used to assess the performance of students' skill sets, providing a more life-like scenario. Gaining perspectives of students' communication skills can provide helpful insight, especially from those other than faculty members.

**Objective:** To gain insight into SP perceptions of what a pharmacist's job entails, student pharmacist communication skills, and to identify opportunities for improvement within the SIUe SOP curriculum.

**Methods:** The Institutional Review Board has approved this observational study (IRB #1674) which includes a 27-question survey completed by standardized patients (SPs) at Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville School of Pharmacy. SPs consist of fourth-year pharmacy students and members of the community. For this study, the SPs were asked to complete a survey based on their perceptions of student communication during their encounter as part of a performance-based assessment (PBA). Factors that were assessed include student communication skills and their likelihood to recommend the student as a pharmacist to someone they know, such as a loved one. The specific assessment of communication was ranking the student as unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or excellent in several categories including verbal mechanics, content, non-verbal expression, interaction with patient, and organization/logic. They were additionally asked to complete pre- and post- surveys relating to an educational video developed by the student researchers to assess the general public's understanding of what pharmacists do and how this may impact their assessment of student communication.

**Results:** A total of 174 responses were attained from a mix of pharmacy students, pharmacy residents, and community volunteers who completed surveys following two PBAs evaluating second-year pharmacy students. An average of 1.0% of the survey scores for five categories of the GC rubric were "unsatisfactory," 37.6% "satisfactory," and 61.3% "excellent." 84.6% of SPs would recommend the student as a pharmacist to someone they know, such as a loved one. The other 14.9% indicated "maybe," and 0.6% responses indicating a definite "no." Interaction with patient was the area with the most "excellent" scores, followed by verbal expression – content, non-verbal expression, verbal expression – mechanics, and organization & logic, respectively. 3 community members provided feedback regarding pharmacists' jobs, and all felt that the educational video provided improved their understanding of what pharmacists do and the importance of communication skills. Nearly all responses from SPs provided positive feedback.

**Conclusion:** The results provide opportunities to develop education points that will result in improvement in counseling skills and increased readiness to be a pharmacist upon graduation. Perceptions of what a pharmacist's job entails likely impacts perceptions of student communication, although the low response rate from community members hinders the ability to reach a conclusive statement. Expanding this study to follow the same groups of students as they progress through pharmacy school is recommended.