Health Administration Student Interns Experience

**SMART™ Training**

Since Spring 2010, Auburn University Health Services Administration (HA) interns, coordinated by Internship Director Jennifer Johnson, begin their semester with a unique, invaluable learning experience called SMART training, in which sophisticated technology and aviation flight training techniques are combined to prepare hundreds of healthcare professionals to provide better patient care. This training occurs through a combination of classroom lecture and the fascinating, highly advanced SimMan mannequin. These mannequins talk. They breathe. They perspire under distress. One gives birth to a baby; another reacts realistically to drugs injected by the trainee; yet another experiences the full spectrum of normal and abnormal heartbeats. Controlled electronically by professionals programming their vital signs, the dummies mimic heart attacks, full codes, and turn blue when oxygen-deprived. In the presence of these high-tech “patients,” HA students participate in decision-making scenarios that require them to think logically and communicate well under pressure.

SMART stands for Synergistic Medical and Resource Team training, and it happens at the Institute for Patient Safety and Medical Simulation in Montgomery, AL. The Institute is a partnership between Auburn University and Baptist Health, who came together to develop a 22,500 square-foot training center on East South Boulevard in Montgomery. A broad spectrum of healthcare professionals uses SMART training, including physicians, nurses, hospital CEOs, paramedics, and the students planning to enter these different fields. Experiencing authentic scenarios simulated with incredibly lifelike dummies helps these professionals and students become better prepared to deal with the stressful situations they will encounter on the job, thus improving both patient safety and work environments for healthcare professionals.

At first glance, this kind of hands-on exercise may seem far removed from health management skills—but in fact, it is essential. SMART training provides Health Administration students with true-to-life decision-making experiences and reminds them that patients are the true focus of healthcare. Although our students won’t need practice giving injections or identifying irregular heartbeats, they will need to make decisions in high-stress situations throughout their careers. They will often make these decisions surrounded by sick or injured patients and emotional nurses, physicians, and family members. SMART training offers them realistic management scenarios that help prepare them for their future work by teaching them to use situation awareness and patterned communication.
SMART training for the HA students is a two-day seminar that combines classroom learning with active simulations. Before beginning simulations, HA students attend a lecture by Dr. Randy Johnson, a professor in Auburn’s College of Business, a former pilot, and one of the founders of this partnership between Auburn and Baptist Health. Dr. Johnson engages the students with PowerPoint presentations, videos, thought-provoking questions, and stories from his professional experiences as he explains the key concepts of situation awareness, working memory, and emotional hijacking. He discusses how to use Patterned Communication by employing the SBAR method: introducing the Situation, communicating Background information, and giving one’s Assessment and Recommendation. Using these strategies, students can decrease working memory and reduce the time it takes to relay critical information.

After several hours of lecture, the students are led into their first scenario with some apprehension over the unknown experience they are about to face. A few students volunteer to act out each scenario, with each student participating multiple times by the time training ends. While some students enact the scenario, the other students watch from the sidelines along with Dr. Johnson. Scenarios range from simple patient complaints to extreme medical errors. In one simulation, for example, students act the part of the CEO, COO, and Nurse Manager handling the emotionally-charged aftermath of the accidental amputation of a patient’s healthy leg. During the first simulation, the students are visibly nervous, reacting to the strangeness of the situation. They falter under the pressure of trying to make good decisions on behalf of their patients, and to communicate those decisions clearly to others, while being observed by peers. But with each passing simulation, and with progressive lectures interwoven between scenarios, they become more and more confident. By the time they complete the last simulation, the students act more assertively, communicate more clearly, and solve problems more calmly.

Auburn’s HA students have a unique opportunity with their access to the Institute for Patient Safety and Medical Simulation. As Auburn’s Health Services Administration program continues to advance efforts to prepare students for the ever-changing healthcare environment, our pioneering partnership with the Institute for Patient Safety and Medical Simulation will surely benefit our students, both academically and as they enter the workforce to help transform the future of healthcare.

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