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Fake Patients: Real Training

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BACKGROUND: Previously, students in medical school learned their skills by the book and then had the opportunity to practice these skills on trained actors mimicking different medical conditions. These acting patients could not present sudden medical problems in their bodies, making the training for the students less applicable in real-life.

ELECTRONIC MANNEQUINS: Florida State University's College of Medicine has implemented new technology to teach students how to handle unique medical conditions and identify emergency treatments. Their four robots, named Harvey, SimMan, Annie and iStan, can be controlled by professors to teach the students how to respond to a given situation.

Students learn where to place a stethoscope and what to listen for. They were expected to identify basic valve disorders using a stethoscope, blood pressure readings and other physiologic data. Faculty can make the mannequin resemble a condition such as an acute myocardial infarction with a ruptured valve, leaving it to the students to identify what they are hearing in the practice patient.

"It helps me find out is the student faking it, or hedging their bets, by giving me a number within normal range? Or are they truly assessing the information in front of them?" Dr. Lisa Granville, associate chair in the Department of Geriatrics and director of the Doctoring Course for First Year Students, was quoted as saying.

Faculty can also use a microphone from the next room to be the voice of the mannequin patient. Lessons are far broader than from an acting patient. The mannequins can be programmed to die, leaving it to the student to react. Students may be asked to go into the next room and share the news with the patient's "parents."

"The beauty of the simulation lab lies in the ability of the faculty to assign each patient a pathological condition," Shaila Siraj, second-year medical student at FSU, was quoted as saying.

FUNDING: Dr. J. Ocie Harris, a former dean of the FSU College of Medicine, played a key role in making the mannequins a reality for the school. Harris approached Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare (TMH) about making a gift toward the school's cause. TMH donated \$750,000 to the College of Medicine, which was matched by the state of Florida, totaling \$1.5 million.