Safe Stress: Medical Improv as an Avenue to Teach Motivational Interviewing and Patient Activation

Pablo De La Cruz, SPT; Ellyce Y Wong, SPT; Jalen Jackson, SPT; Rachel Marrs, SPT; Mackenzie O’Hara, SPT; Jonathan Webb, MBA; Justin Drogos, PT, DPT, PhD(c)

Background
Medical improvisation (improv) is a new training approach in healthcare education that uses improvisational theater techniques to teach skills such as communication, teamwork, and cognition. Improv instruction and its impact on student learning, participation, and experience has not been fully described in the literature. Based on previous findings with DPT students, medical improv has been shown to promote better engagement in roleplaying and creates a fun and comfortable environment for student learning.

Research Objectives
Our case study aimed to integrate medical improv techniques into 2 role-playing labs in the Psychosocial Aspects of Human Behavior 2 course of the Northwestern University DPT program and examine the outcome on students and faculty. We wanted to explore the interaction of novel exercises with previous medical improv experience, prior psychosocial coursework and clinical experiences, and its impact on the learning experience for students and faculty.

Methods
All second-year DPT students participated in medical improv exercises (“1776” and “New Choice”) as part of labs focused on motivational interviewing and patient activation. 9 of 11 course faculty were trained in the exercises before the course began. Following the labs, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted separately with students and faculty. Transcripts were analyzed using segmentation and inductive analysis.

Focus Group Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in years: mean (range)</td>
<td>25.7 (23 - 31)</td>
<td>63.3 (1-17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Male/Female</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>1/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extroversion: mean (range)</td>
<td>3.7 (2 - 5)</td>
<td>9/9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extension measured by asking “How outgoing are you?”; 5 - most, 0 - least

Results: Themes

Shared between Students and Faculty
- Facilitator plays a key role in teaching experience
- Debrief of how exercises relates to clinical skills and class objectives is a key component to medical improv
- The chosen medical improv exercises most linked with clinical skills of communication and adaptability

Unique to Students
- Previous medical improv experience was helpful because it allowed students to focus on the “why” and not the “what”.

Unique to Faculty
- Medical improv provides a safe stress for learning.

Conclusion
Medical improv is a tool to promote engagement for learning motivational interviewing and patient activation as part of a psychosocial DPT curriculum. Prior experience with improv is beneficial for both students and faculty when implementing it into the classroom. A debrief is necessary to facilitate connection between improv and clinical applications.

Clinical Implications
Medical improv can be a useful tool for DPT students and clinicians to practice clinical skills in a safe stress environment. Implementing advanced improv exercises may benefit from more faculty training.

Acknowledgements
Thank you to the Northwestern DPT Class of ’25; Beth Holland, PT, DPT; and the faculty and staff involved in the Psychosocial coursework series.

References

“I think doing improv, specifically improv, and feeling that uncomfortable feeling...that feeling of kind of wanting to throw up and kind of being like really excited that you’re going to Disneyland...they’re the same, right? You know, like, I love that it’s challenging me like, neurologically and emotionally in a way that I do not challenge myself on a regular basis.”

- Faculty 5