

Standardization Patients (SP)

Tip Sheet

A **Standardized Patient (SP)** is a layperson hired and trained to portray the role of actual patient, presenting a faculty defined clinical scenario with patient history and physical symptoms for teaching and assessment purposes. The SP then interacts in clinical encounters with medical learners.

SPs can measure clinical application of knowledge during encounters with students that include: History Taking/Interview, Physical Examination, Communication Skills, Patient Management, Physical Exam Etiquette and Interpersonal Skills (Rapport Building, Information Gathering).

SPs can be further trained as teaching associates. A Standardized Patient Teaching Associate is a person who acts as both instructor and patient, utilizing his/her own body to instruct and evaluate in the technique of the head-to-toe physical exam in a non-threatening, standardized, positive encounter.

Benefits of Using SPs

The use of standardized patients allows the student to apply newly acquired attitude, skills and knowledge at the bedside in an environment that does not put an actual patient at risk.

Advantages to Students/Residents:

- Availability
- Anxiety Reduction
- Educated feedback from the patient perspective
- Authenticity
- Consistency and accuracy
- Focus on learner's performance
- Encouragement of active learning
- Teach sensitive topics and examinations

Advantages for Educational Programs / Curriculum:

- Reinforces and documents curricular goals
- Provides feedback about teaching effectiveness
- Requires and emphasizes defined objectives
- Requires defined performance criteria
- Forces critical look at curriculum
- Allows Programmatic assessment of overall curriculum

Advantages for Faculty:

- Faculty control of content and complexity
- Relieves faculty of time-consuming instruction and assessment of basic skills
- Provides a reproducible, reliable experience for all students, allowing teaching and assessment of core skills
- Provides quantitative feedback about student performance and applied skills not available through other methods.

Most medical schools throughout the U.S. and Canada have standardized patient programs based in either the Dean's office or the office of Medical Education. For more information contact your local schools. It is to your advantage to take advantage of this well documented methodology and the professionals in the field. Most SP educators will be happy to collaborate with you in accomplishing your goals. The Association of Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE) is the international professional association of the field. Visit their website at www.aspeducators.org for more information.

Some frequently asked questions about the use of SPs include:

How do I recruit a Standardized Patient?

Individuals interested in becoming Standardized Patients do not need to have any prior medical background. Men and women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds can become SPs. Prospective SPs are screened and interviewed before training. They must have good reading and verbal communication skills, have the ability to adhere to a standardized format and be reliable and punctual. The job takes energy, memorization, discipline, concentration, excellent communication skills, and a high level of comfort with their own health and in dealing with the medical profession. You can recruit by placing an advertisement in your local paper, listing the position on your institutions HR site or by placing flyers on college campuses, coffee shops, etc....

What is involved in training a Standardized Patient?

SPs usually spend anywhere from 4-10 hours training with an SP trainer and faculty. Typical training sessions are 2 hours each and include review of case material, role-play with trainer and practice recording data. Before encountering students, SPs are required to successfully present or demonstrate their "character" for a faculty member or SP trainer.

What are the costs of using Standardized Patients?

SPs are paid \$15 - \$35 per hour for the work itself. These rates vary depending on what part of the country you are in. There are other underlying costs of using a Standardized Patient, such as training, but this can be off set by collaborating with an existing SP Program in your area.

How do I find out more about Standardized Patients?

Any Standardized Patient educator will be happy to talk to you and give you more detailed information. The following contacts and links will help you find a Standardized Patient Educator.

Delia Anderson, ASPE President
Director, Tulane Standardized Patient Program
Tulane University School of Medicine
TUXCOE National Center of Excellence in Women's Health
dander@tulane.edu

(ASPE) Association of Standardized Patient Educators
www.aspeducators.org

Standardized Patient Educators ListServe

sp-trainer@u.washington.edu

Contact Jennie Struijk, janim@u.washington.edu for more info.