

1. DEFINITION

A debrief is a critical reflection which takes place after the simulation has been completed. The debriefing portion of the exercise is important as it provides an opportunity for the students to receive immediate feedback from their instructor, or, if done in a group setting, to discuss the simulation and its outcomes with their peers.

2. BEST PRACTICES

- a. **Approach.** Consider when planning this phase what method of debrief is most appropriate for your exercise. Some options to consider are individual versus group, oral verses written and whether or not the debrief itself should be graded. Consider what criteria are going to inform which debrief method you chose:
 1. **Class Size.** A large group simulation might benefit more from an oral or written group debrief rather than an individual one.
 2. **Time.** Due to constraints around time and instructor-to-student ratios, one-on-one debriefs might be difficult or impossible to administer in large group settings. Conversely, given the sensitive and real-world nature of simulations related to patient care, individual debriefs are often considered most appropriate in the applied health sciences (Wickers, 2010: 83).
- b. **How to stimulate discussion.** Consider beginning a debriefing with a short summary of what occurred, noting the highlights (both positive and negative) of the simulation. Afterwards, consider posing questions to stimulate discussion and reflection. Some suggested questions to spark discussion: Did the simulation unfold the way you expected? What was easier or harder than you expected? What did you learn from the simulation? How did our fictionalized simulation differ from what actually transpires in the real world?

According to Millenbah and Millspaugh (2003), one of the most effective ways to stimulate critical self-reflection is to have students record their thoughts and expectations before the simulation and to compare those notes with how the simulation actually transpired (p. 132). If the simulation is the culmination of a long or extensive curriculum, it may be worth asking students to keep a brief journal of their activities from the start of the course, as it might help them to reference their earlier thoughts and experiences in relation to the simulation.

- c. **Content vs skill development.** If the simulation objective is tied more closely to course learning objectives rather than skill improvement, consider incorporating both new

course material and recently studied course material into the simulation. By incorporating both types of course material the instructor is then able to ask the students during the debrief session to comment on whether they found the simulation activity helpful for understanding the material (especially the material they had already gone over earlier in the term) (Millenbah & Millspaugh, 2003: 133). If skill development and assessment is the objective of the simulation, then keeping a record of proficiency benchmarks and incorporating them into a graph to reference during the debrief may be a useful tool for stimulating reflection while offering a tangible display of progress (Shellman & Turan, 2006: 28).

3. DISCIPLINES

Health Sciences

The existing scholarship suggests holding a debrief session immediately after the simulation is complete, ideally in a clinical setting in order to mirror the learning experience of the simulation itself. Both Mayville (2011) and Wickers (2010) stress the importance of individual debriefs in imparting feedback on skill retention and progress with learning objectives.

Natural Sciences

Laboratory settings can utilize the experimental environment and tools within the debrief session. Note-taking and journal writing can also be valuable contributors to debriefing in courses with large student numbers (Millenbah & Millspaugh, 2003).

Social Sciences

Writing is such an integral part of learning in the social sciences that it should form an important pillar of the debriefing process. Shellman and Turan (2006) discuss the merits of oral versus written debrief in a social science classroom.

4. RESOURCES

Mayville, M.L. (2011). Debriefing: The Essential Step in Simulation. *Newborn and Infant Nursing Reviews*, 11(1), 35-39.

Millenbah, K., & Millspaugh, J. (2003). Using Experiential Learning in Wildlife Courses to Improve Retention, Problem Solving, and Decision-Making. *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 31(1), 127-137.

Shellman, S. M., & Turan, K. (2006). Do simulations enhance student learning? An empirical evaluation of an IR simulation. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 2(1), 19-32.

Wickers, M. P. (2010). Establishing the climate for a successful debriefing. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 6(3), 83-86.