

# TRAINING MEDICAL STUDENTS TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Scott Lindgren, PhD; Michael Hoenig, MA; Ann Riley, MSN; Kay DeGarmo, BA

### Abstract

Communicating effectively with people with disabilities is a critical skill for physicians to learn. To teach this skill, the University of lowa developed an efficient, interactive method for training third-year medical students to communicate and interact with children and adults with disabilities. Students report very high satisfaction with training, combined with significant increases in knowledge, skills, empathy, and confidence. These training methods are effective in producing post-training changes in students and can be provided efficiently within a busy medical school curriculum.

# Why is This Training Needed?

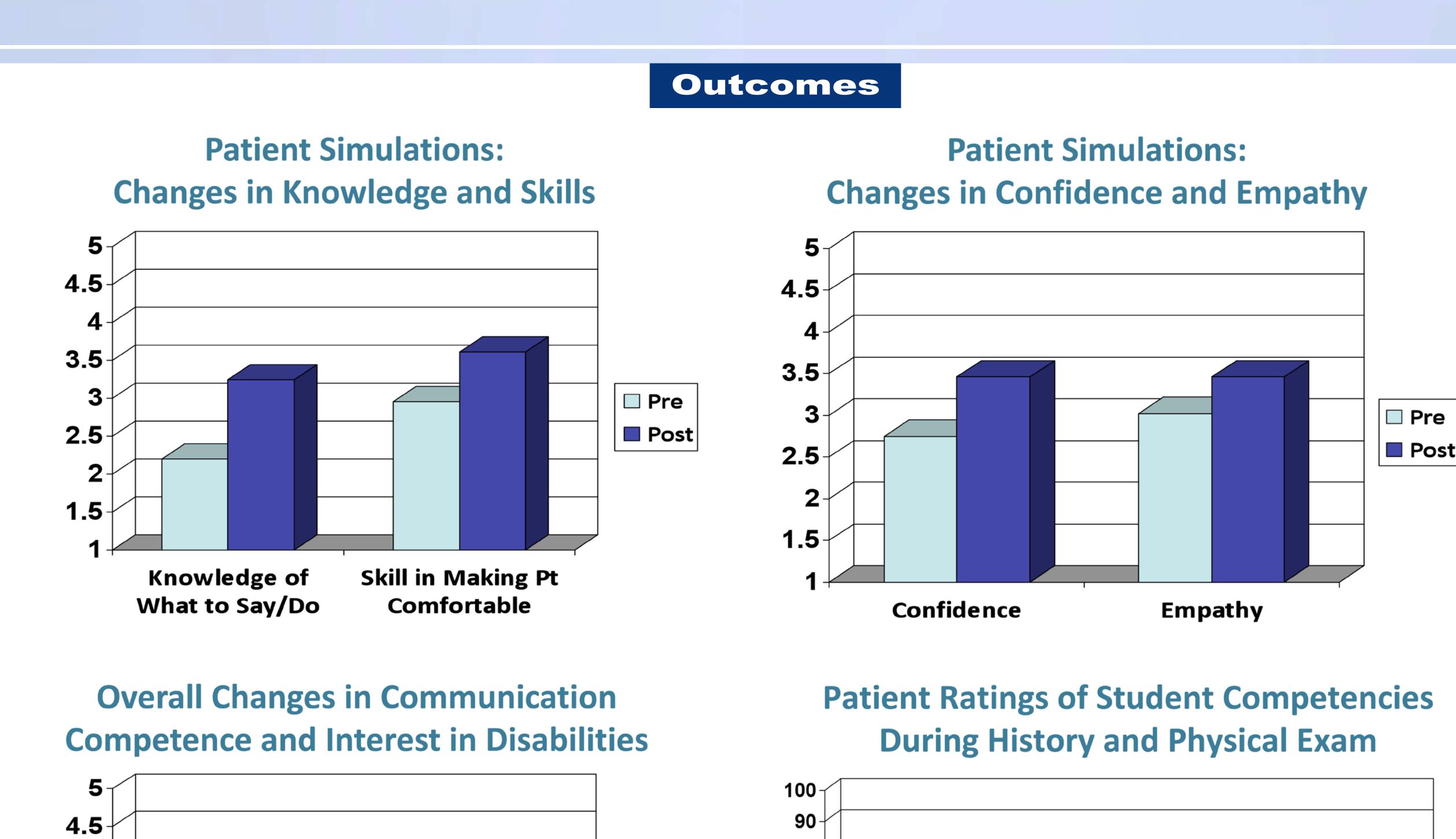
People with disabilities often report having difficult interactions with those medical providers who are insensitive to their personal experiences and specific care needs, who are uncomfortable interacting with people who have mobility or communication challenges, or who fail to respect them as capable people who are defined by more than their disabilities. To change this situation, the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine and the lowa UCEDD developed a program to train medical students to communicate and interact comfortably and effectively with children and adults with disabilities. This program gives students the opportunity to ask questions, to obtain direct feedback from patients about their performance, and to learn more effective ways of communicating.

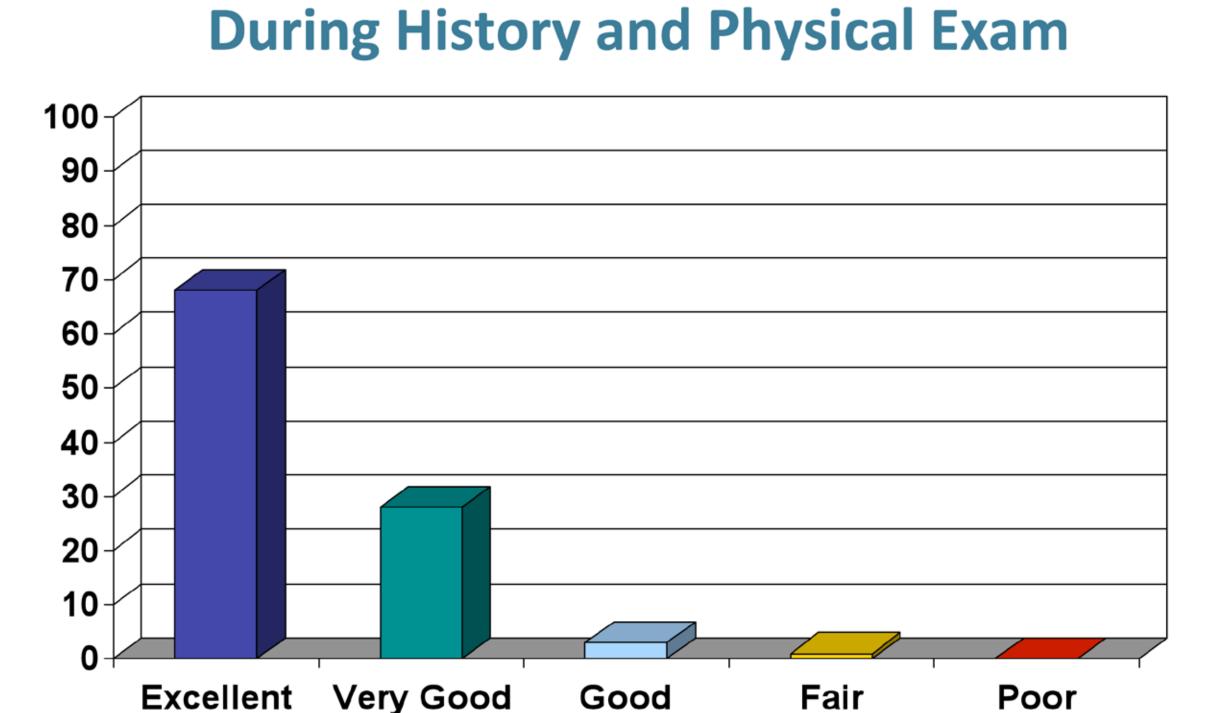
# **Teaching Methods**

- Focus is on developing communication and interaction skills while doing a history and physical exam as part of a 25-minute simulated health maintenance visit.
- Faculty work with 6-8 third-year medical students during each 2-hour session.
- Each student participates in two exams, either alone or with a partner.
- Both children and adults serve as volunteer patients.
- Students rate their own skills and attitudes before and after training.
- Volunteer patients evaluate each student's competencies and provide written and oral feedback to students.
- The session ends with a group discussion of disability issues and specific challenges encountered during the exams.

### **Program Evaluation**

For 226 medical students trained over the course of two years, students used a 5-point rating scale to report significant pre-post increases (p < .01) in knowledge (2.20 vs 3.24), communication skills (2.69 vs 3.40), empathy (3.02 vs 3.46), and confidence (2.75 vs 3.46). Volunteer patients reported very good to excellent performance by 96% of students. Students reported very high overall satisfaction with training (98%).





# Student Comments About the Training

- "The patients were wonderful about explaining and giving feedback"
- "It was good to have willing, open patients who cared about teaching how to better communicate"
- "Finding that interacting with people with disabilities is much like other patients was eye opening"
- "I learned not to assume levels of dependence or independence"
- "I enjoyed learning from the parents they were excellent teachers"
- "It was just amazing!"

# Acknowledgements

This program was supported by the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, the Center for Disabilities and Development (Iowa's UCEDD) at the University of Iowa Children's Hospital, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Disability and Health Program at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



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Future Interest

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Communication

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