



TAKING GRANDPA TO CLASSROOM

Applying Standardized Patient Model to the Assessment of the Elderly

Hsieh Mei-Lin, Assistant Professor, Nursing Department, Tzu Chi University



The Nursing Department at Tzu Chi University has been using objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) in conjunction with standardized patient (SP) to teach physical examination classes for many years. Due to an increasing aging population, there is a need to include elderly patients into our curriculum. Educational courses incorporating elderly physical examination and elderly standardized patient allow students the opportunities to interact with patients directly, and to conduct health assessment and provide post-examination consultation. Students can then enhance their assessment skills through clinical trials.

Five standardized elderly patients sixty-five years old or older participated in the third-year college students' physical examination and assessment classes. Prior to the actual



examination, students were trained with necessary materials and lesson plan. Written materials were also enlarged as big print for easy reference during the actual testing. The enlarged print is: “As we age, our body will change and our biological function will deteriorate. For the purposes of this course, please share your medical history, and please relax during your interaction with students and teachers. Do not be concerned with your vision or hearing impairment. We want to thank you once again for allowing us the opportunity.” The elderly patients smiled with relief after reading the passage. Many said, “I was worried that I won’t be able to memorize the full script for the class, now I just have to be myself.”

The course started by describing the lesson plan, followed by an introduction of the standardized elderly patients. The following reports are summarized by the students after completion.

Student Nurse Liao Pei-Han

When the adorable elderly man walked into the room with a timid smile, we were all excited because it was the first time (aside from interacting with fellow students) we had to examine a live human being, not to mention a person we were not familiar with!

The man was hearing impaired so we had to stand very close to him and speak loudly and slowly in order to communicate with him. He said, “My many organ functions are declining because of age, I have pain everywhere.” Grandpa suffered from dizziness, hearing impairment, cataract, high blood pressure, gout, skin allergies and varicose veins, etc. It looks like aging is the biggest enemy of human beings.

Student Nurse Pan Yi-Cen

I felt that today’s experience was very special because when we practiced with other classmates it was hard to examine and discover anything unusual. This time we were able to assess patients with developed symptoms. It simulates an environment comparable to a real patient in the hospital.

Student Nurse Lu Pei-Fang

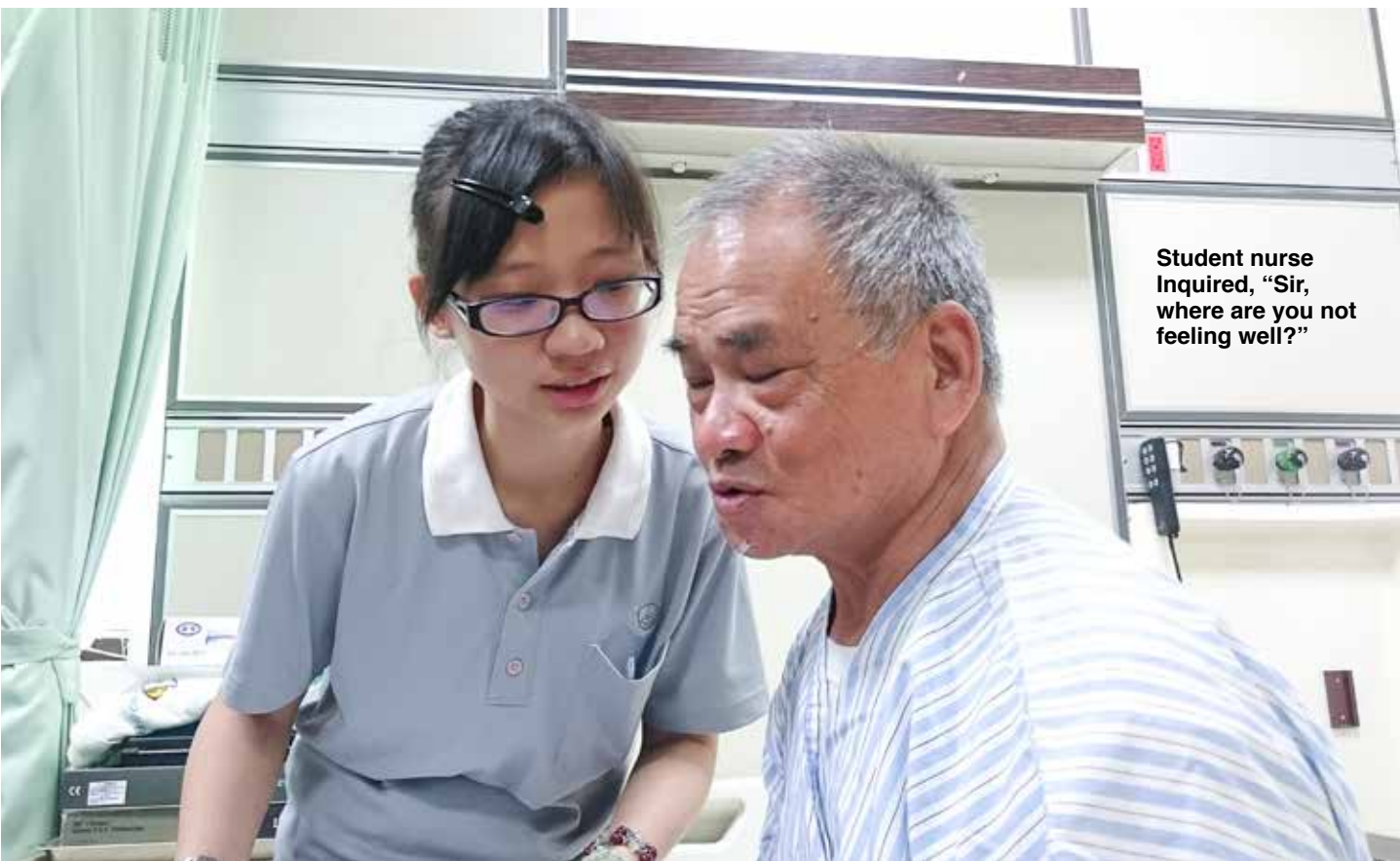
To me, this was such an unusual learning experience because I had never been exposed to such a teaching method. This course integrates standardized patients to approximate real-life clinical experience; it reinforces memory. Things can change and can be out of our control so learning how to react and respond to crisis is important. First time I was shy, nervous, hesitant, scared, and concerned but soon after I was able to get a hang of it and carried through.

Student Nurse Tsai Meng-Ting

The elderly man mentioned that he had been bothered by lightheadedness for the past few years. In addition to PQRST study, I confirmed that he had been taking high blood pressure medications. Teacher once said, “You must find the problem in order to treat the disease.” Nursing is not just a skill learned by practicing, we must also be observant. Being able to read and interpret information given by the patients can help with correct diagnosis.

Student Nurse Lee Ying-Zhen

My standardized elderly patient is hearing impaired. I seriously re-examined my strategy to interact with the patient. When we practice with



Student nurse
Inquired, "Sir,
where are you not
feeling well?"

fellow classmates, we usually speak fast since we already know the steps so the whole process usually doesn't take long to complete. Through interaction with this standardized elderly patient, I realized I needed to slow down my talk to enunciate and articulate. Otherwise, it would affect the downstream examination process. This course is encompassing all the topics for the semester. Through this type of teaching medium, I have a deeper understanding of the patients.

Student Nurse Lee You-Xuan

There are big differences between adult and the elderly when it comes to the physical. Many of the chronic diseases are the result of aging due to deterioration. In addition, the elderly man really loved to share his life stories. Upon examination of his medical history, we also learned his backgrounds and many life philosophies. I think this course is great because we were able to apply book knowledge on real patients in a clinical setting.

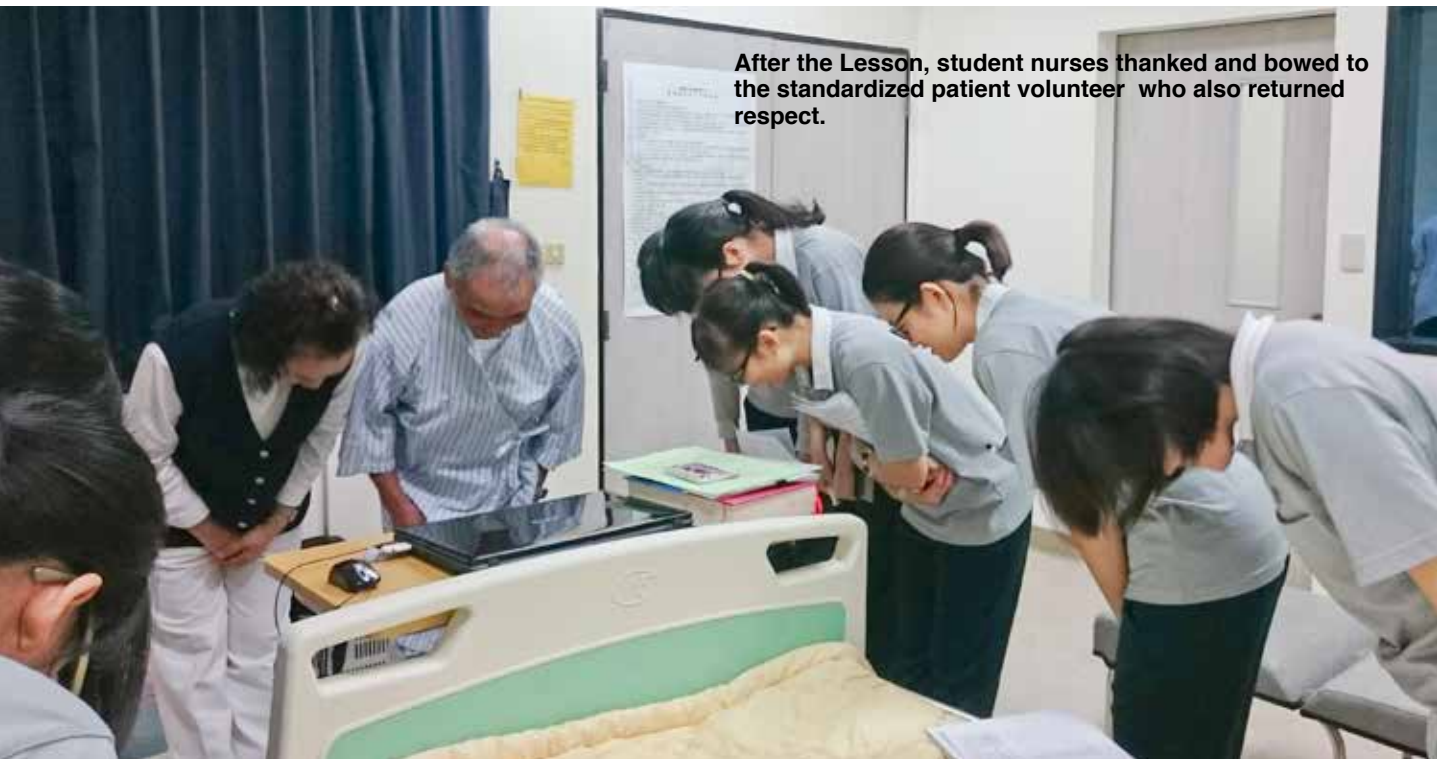


Student Nurse Wong Zi-Ying

During an examination of his abdomen, the old gentleman expressed discomfort and I was thankful my teacher stepped in with guidance; otherwise I would feel silly not knowing how to proceed. When I examined the man's joints, I saw what gout could do to a patient. Upon reflection, I saw my shortcomings, including the ability to react real-time and paying attention to details which were often overlooked in past practices.

It has long been the expectation of teachers to shorten the gap between classroom and clinical practice. From the students' sharing, we recognized the positive effect of bringing standardized elderly patient into teaching. It was only through interaction with real patients that students learned to be more observant, and to attend to the need of their patients.

Treating diseases as our teachers: Before ending the lesson, all of the nursing students bowed to the standardized elderly patients to show their respect and appreciation for their contribution. Because of their selfless giving, patience and tolerance, they allowed students an invaluable opportunity to learn and experience.



After the Lesson, student nurses thanked and bowed to the standardized patient volunteer who also returned respect.