Simulation-Based Learning for Clinical Judgment and Practice Readiness in Practical Nursing Education

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Research focus

Background

Clinical placements offer different opportunities to notice changes in a patient's condition. Simulation gives every student a chance to practise those decisions. For a practical nursing program in northern British Columbia, the task is to make that practice fit available lab time, staffing, and equipment.

Guiding question

How should simulation-based learning be integrated into practical nursing education to support clinical judgment and readiness for practice?

Literature review approach

I searched CINAHL, MEDLINE/PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, then grouped findings by theme. Because evidence specific to practical nursing was limited, I also considered studies of students in bachelor's nursing programs.

Theory and positionality

Learning through experience

Dewey (1916) connects experience with inquiry. In simulation, students can review what happened, consider why their response helped or fell short, and test a revised decision in a second case.

A model of clinical judgment

Tanner's model, discussed by Yang et al. (2019), describes noticing, interpreting, responding, and reflecting. These parts help instructors discuss how students reach decisions as well as what they do.

My teaching perspective

As a registered nurse and practical nursing instructor, I value hearing students' reasoning alongside observing their actions. I also consider what the clinical placement gave students a chance to demonstrate.

Debrief prompt
What will you try differently in the next case?

Literature review

Clinical judgment

In a Chinese study of 157 nursing undergraduates, students who practised with people trained to portray patients received stronger clinical judgment ratings than students taught by traditional methods (Yang et al., 2019).

Debriefing and psychological safety

A review found wide variation in debriefing methods. Interviews also identified anxiety about evaluation, supporting clear expectations and respectful discussion after the scenario (Fegran et al., 2023; Ko & Choi, 2020).

Transfer into placement

Nursing students described applying simulation learning in placement. Those interviews tell us what students recalled and perceived. Direct observation can add evidence of how they act when a similar situation arises (Hustad et al., 2019).

Matching the design to the goal

A meta-analysis of 40 studies found learning benefits across simulation formats. Effects varied by outcome and did not increase consistently with technological realism. Match the format to the learning goal (Kim et al., 2016).

Assessing readiness for practice

In a Norwegian bachelor's nursing program, students rated their judgment higher than the evaluator did in simulation and placement. Combining student reflection with instructor observation gives educators two sources of evidence (Høegh-Larsen et al., 2023).

Evidence behind the pilot

40 studies
Fidelity review

157 students
Clinical judgment trial

Kim et al. (2016) reviewed simulation formats. Yang et al. (2019) compared teaching methods in Chinese nursing undergraduates.

Recommendations

Build repeated practice into the term

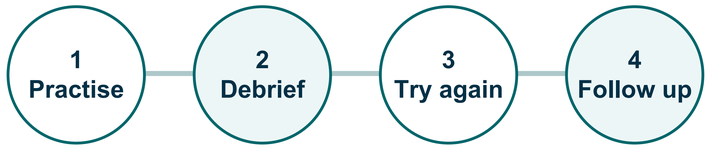
Start with patient deterioration and a medication concern. Give each student an active role and schedule a variation the following week so they can apply the feedback.

Protect time for guided debriefing

Clarify expectations before the case. Use shared prompts afterward so students can explain their decisions, work through uncertainties, and choose one change for their next attempt.

Use shared criteria in placement

Pair student reflection with instructor observation during an existing progress review. Record which situations students had a chance to encounter.



Proposed sequence from simulation to clinical placement.

Conclusion and gaps

Pilot the sequence for one term

The pilot would test feasibility and help instructors see what students carry into patient care. Look for what students notice, how they explain their response, and when they seek help.

Questions for future work

Track observed judgment into early practice in Canadian practical nursing cohorts. Invite local Indigenous partners through existing relationships to shape relevant scenarios and decide how materials may be shared.

Placement prompt
What did you notice first? When did you ask for help?

Scan for the references