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La Roche nursing students perfect skill by using SimMan

by **Bethany Hofstetter**
Staff Writer
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The patient lays motionless on the table responding to the nurse anesthetist students as they ask him how he feels, take his blood pressure, check the heart rate, insert an IV and prepare the patient for anesthesia.



Photo by Submitted

Nothing is out of place in the mock operating room except the patient is made of plastic.

SimMan, a patient simulator, is La Roche College's newest addition to its School of Nurse Anesthesia, run in partnership with Allegheny Valley Hospital.

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In 2007, La Roche College received a \$96,070 grant from the Buhl Foundation which allowed the school to provide a high-tech mock operating room for the graduate nurse anesthesia program.

This year marks the first year all 20 students in the graduate program are required to practice on SimMan before they see their first patient.

"These kids traditionally started intubation on actual patients," says Don Fugito, who oversees the health science graduate program.

"They've approached this as if it's their first operating room experience. I think all of them really appreciate having SimMan as their first patient."

The students are required to "scrub in" before entering the mock operating room, which is complete with IV poles, a medical cart and

anesthesia gas machine.

Laerdal Medical Corporation, which also produces Resusci Anne, manufactures the simulators which are programmed to simulate every aspect of a patient's vital signs. The SimMan can be programmed to gag, speak, breathe, have high blood pressure and accept IV lines, and has several preprogrammed medical scenarios for the students to solve.

In order to make the learning experience more beneficial, the nurse anesthesia students will be required to write a scenario -- by pulling from experiences they have had while on rotation at Allegheny Valley Hospital -- to provide future students with more experience with SimMan before entering a real operating room.

By the summer, the La Roche College administration also hopes to purchase SimBaby for the program as well as set up an advanced video system to film the operating room scenarios and play them back for the students to enhance debriefing, Fugito says.

He adds that the graduate health science program also is looking into having LCD monitors set up in the hallways so students and faculty can observe the mock operating room while passing through the hallways.

However, Deborah Davison, the School of Anesthesia program director at Allegheny Valley Hospital, says already the hospital staff has seen an improvement in the nurse anesthesia students, and she looks forward to expanding the mock program.

"We're planning on developing more advanced (scenarios) for situations we don't encounter on a day-to-day basis such as malignant hypothermia, an anaphylactic scenario, cardiac arrest ... situations that occur but not on a frequent basis," she says.

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SimMan isn't flawless, Davison says, pointing out the SimMan doesn't imitate a human's airways perfectly-- particularly to practice tracheal intubation, which is required to protect a patient's airway and support mechanical ventilation -- but it provides the students with a very good simulation.

The mock operating room also allows the students to practice where to position themselves in the operating room and respond to the other people in the room.

"The staff, for sure, did notice they adjusted more quickly," Davison says. "They didn't have that 'deer in the headlights' look when they walked into the O.R. and were familiar with directives the staff would give them."

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