

Enhancing Communication Module Assessment in Nursing Education

Pajany Vythelingum

Health, Sports and Bioscience school, University of East London, United Kingdom

Corresponding author

Pajany Vythelingum, Health, Sports and Bioscience school, University of East London, United Kingdom

Received: June 29, 2026; Accepted: July 10, 2026; Published: July 27, 2026

ABSTRACT

Background: The Communication module previously relied on OSCEs with lecturers acting as patients, which posed challenges for both staff and students. Students reported heightened anxiety when lecturers assumed patient roles [1], while lecturers expressed concerns about inconsistent acting and difficulty identifying student errors. The existing SBAR-focused assessment lacked integration with module alignment.

Objective: To enhance the learner experience by accessing and assessing real world issues innovatively.

Design: To address these issues, a new assessment model was developed using video-based scenarios that reflect poor communication practices observed in clinical placements. Drawing on simulation expertise, actors were introduced to enhance realism and engagement [2].

Method: Inspired by UEL's performing arts school, students recorded reflective video presentations using Microsoft Teams, enabling secure storage and ongoing access. Scenarios were co-developed with stakeholders and drama students, incorporating service user input to ensure authenticity. Health Action Training (HAT) was undertaken to support actor preparation and deepen understanding of empathy and communication. Scripts were refined collaboratively, and actors received training on empathy, behavior, and cultural diversity. Three scenarios were filmed with student actors, guided by lecturers and service users. Debriefing ensured psychological safety, aligning with best practices in simulation-based education [3-6]. Students analyzed the videos, identified communication strengths and weaknesses, and submitted reflective assessments online.

Results: This approach reduced staff burden, improved scalability, and fostered critical thinking. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with students reporting increased confidence and understanding. Assessment data showed 75% submission success, with 85% passing on the first attempt and fewer than 5% failing upon resubmission.

Conclusion: This interdisciplinary collaboration demonstrated the value of creative partnerships in healthcare education. The video-based assessment model offers a sustainable, impactful alternative to traditional OSCEs, enhancing communication skills and promoting empathetic practice [7-11].

Background

The Communication module is currently delivered via an Observed Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), where lecturers act as patients. With large student cohorts, multiple lecturers are required to perform, which can be challenging for both students and staff. Students often find it daunting when their lecturer becomes the patient, which can provoke anxiety [1].

Some lecturers have expressed concerns about inconsistent acting and being too focused on performance to notice student errors. To address this, the aim was to help students identify poor practices and reflect on lessons learned. The current SBAR-focused assessment was clinical and lacked integration with the module's communication content.

Drawing from experience as a simulation lead, working with professional actors improved fidelity and student engagement. Simulated patients (SPs) bring theatrical skills and feedback techniques that enhance realism and learning outcomes [2]. This approach also fostered empathy and changed clinical practice perspectives.

Objective

The assessment currently did not align with the objectives from the module. The Module taught valuable lessons such as emotional intelligence, evidence based nursing care, applying a person-centered approach, human factors, cultural intelligence and patient safety. A new assessment would aid the student to identify these issues and escalate them appropriately.

Citation: Pajany Vythelingum. Enhancing Communication Module Assessment in Nursing Education.. J Med Clin Nurs Stud. 2026. 4(4): 1-3.

DOI: doi.org/10.61440/JMCNS.2026.v4.123

Method

Scaling this model for classroom use posed challenges. OSCEs are time-intensive, and lecturer availability is limited. A new approach was needed to highlight poor communication behaviors, allowing students to reflect on real-world experiences from clinical placements.

Consultation with UEL stakeholders helped identify recurring issues in practice. These were transformed into scenarios for assessment. The goal was to create a less labor-intensive yet authentic assessment. Discussions with senior lecturers and guidance through the NMC standards explored alternatives to essays and posters. A video-based presentation was proposed, allowing students to reflect on communication scenarios [10].

Inspired by UEL's performing arts school, where dance students used smartphone recordings for self-reflection, this method was adapted for nursing. It allowed students to observe and improve their communication style with minimal resources and high impact.

Empathy, facial expressions, and speech are critical in nursing, where 90% of the role is patient-facing. Reflective video submissions would allow students to analyze their responses to poor practice scenarios.

To enhance immersion, video scenarios were created using drama students. Collaboration with the drama school led to actor involvement and filming support. To better understand acting processes, Health Action Training (HAT) was undertaken, offering insights into empathy and communication through experiential learning [4].

Scripts were developed and refined with the drama team, who assessed actor needs, props, and logistics. Concerns arose about actors' understanding of healthcare communication. Service users were involved to guide actors in portraying authentic patient experiences.

Teaching sessions on empathy, behaviour, and cultural diversity were provided to actors, enhancing their performance. This interdisciplinary collaboration between nursing and performing arts demonstrated the value of creative partnerships in healthcare education [5].

Empathy training has shown to improve patient outcomes and should be embedded in healthcare education [9].

The scenarios were filmed with service users and lecturers present to guide the actors through realistic healthcare situations. Three scenarios were filmed using six student actors. At the end of filming, students were debriefed to ensure psychological safety, as some scenarios could have emotional impacts. This aligns with best practices in simulation-based education, where psychological safety is essential for effective learning and emotional well-being [6].

If needed, the drama students were referred to the wellbeing team, due to the content of the videos filmed. The drama team edited the videos for assessment use. This collaboration ensured

students were exposed to real-life events which would aid future placements, offering a new perspective and allowing them to practice communication skills in a safe, controlled environment [11].

Results

Students recorded their presentations using Microsoft Teams, UEL's platform for online meetings. This ensured secure storage on their personal OneDrive accounts, allowing ongoing access for future reflection. The module leader also had access for marking. Microsoft Teams has been recognized as a tool that supports authentic assessment and real-world collaboration in higher education [3].

From an assessment perspective, 75% of students successfully recorded and submitted their presentations. Of those, 85% passed the module on their first attempt. This highlights the effectiveness of the approach and its potential to positively influence practice, which will continue to be monitored through healthcare stakeholder feedback. A common challenge to the students who failed at the first hurdle, were technical issues, such as forgetting to press record, forgetting to unmute themselves, and time management such as an under detailed prolonged presentation. In the resubmission of the assessment, of the students that submitted their assessment less than 5% failed their assessment.

Conclusion

Students watched the videos to identify good and poor practices, then completed an online assessment. This method reduced the need for multiple lecturers and offered a scalable alternative to traditional OSCEs. It also encouraged critical thinking and improved student outcomes. Actor-led simulations have been shown to enhance authenticity and student engagement in communication training [7].

Feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive. They reported being pushed out of their comfort zones and gaining deeper understanding of care practices. All nursing students were able to identify poor communication and propose evidence-based improvements to ensure patient safety. Reflection and feedback are essential components of nursing education, supporting professional development and improved care delivery [8].

References

1. Kelly M A, Mitchell M L, Henderson A, Jeffrey C A, Groves M. OSCE best practice guidelines-applicability for nursing simulations. *Advances in Simulation*. 2016. 1: 1-10.
2. Roe R. When and How to Advocate for Standardized Patient Actors in Healthcare Simulation. *Healthy Simulation*. 2025.
3. Evans, N. Microsoft Teams Supports Authentic Assessment of Learning. *Journal of Teaching and Learning with Technology*, 2022.11: 37-50.
4. Health Action Training. *Nursing Now Challenge*. 2023.
5. Gray J, Cartmill C, Whitehead C. Playing well with others: lessons from theatre for the health professions about collaboration, creativity and community. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*. 2024. 29: 1611-1630.
6. Madsgaard A, Svellingen A. The benefits and boundaries of psychological safety in simulation-based education: an integrative review. *BMC Nursing*. 2025. 24. 1-10.

7. Antila A K, Lindblom S, Louhiala P, Pyörälä E. Creating a safe space: medical students' perspectives on using actor simulations for learning communication skills. *BMC Medical Education*. 2024. 24: 1-11.
8. Supporting information for reflection in nursing and midwifery practice. Nursing and Midwifery Council. 2024. <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/standards/supporting-information-for-reflection-in-nursing-and-midwifery-practice.pdf>
9. Elevating Patient Care through Empathy. Professional, Corporate, and Continuing Education Insights. Harvard Medical School, 2024.
10. Traynor M, Rice B. Video-based reflections to support assessment in nursing. *Queen's DigiHub*. 2023.
11. Daneshfar M and Moonaghi H K. The impact of clinical simulation on bridging the theory-practice gap in nursing education: a systematic review. *BMC Medical Education*. 2025. 25: 1216.