

Demystifying De-escalation: An Online Curriculum for Working with Agitated Patients

Stoudemire Innovations in Education Award Presentation

Scott A. Simpson, MD MPH *Denver Health and University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, scott.simpson@dhha.org*

Agitation can be a symptom of serious underlying illness, a safety risk to the patient and staff, and increase the likelihood of physical restraint and coercive measures.

Regardless of etiology, verbal de-escalation is the first line of treatment for agitated patients. However, many clinicians do not learn how to de-escalate agitated patients.

Innovation

We developed a 5-part, 39 minute online video curriculum to teach best practices in verbal de-escalation.

View the curriculum at tinyurl.com/verbaldeescalation

Objectives and features of the curriculum are described at right.

Development

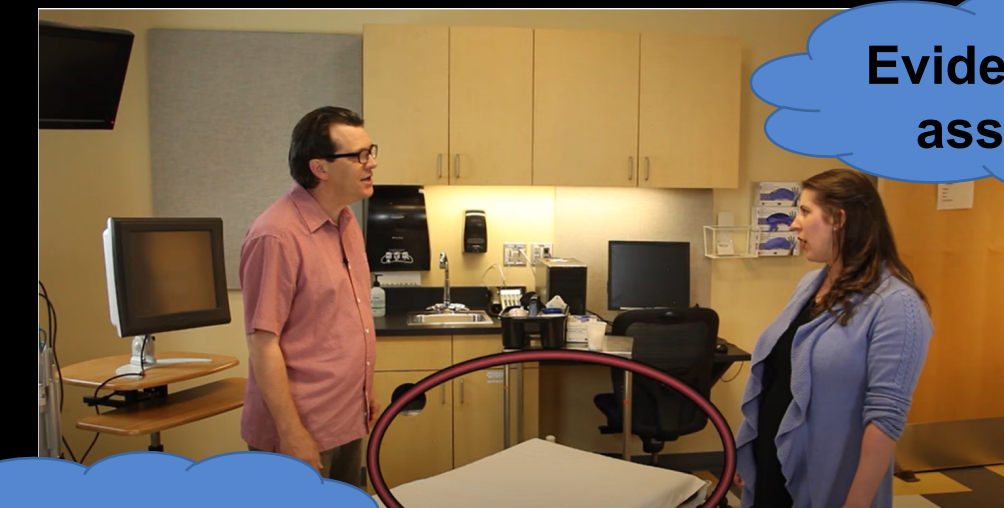
The curriculum is based on consensus guidelines for managing agitated patients in emergency settings (Richmond 2012, PMID: 22461917). Feedback on content was obtained from students, staff, and faculty prior to production.

Videos were professionally filmed in a simulation center; production was supported by Denver Health and the University of Colorado. Patients were played by hired actors with experience in patient simulation. Staff were actual faculty, staff, and trainees.

We were conscientious of on-screen representation and diversity throughout development. We intentionally recruited a diverse cast. Actors were given only basic character outlines to allow flexibility in their presentation. Actors were allowed to switch characters or opt out of scenes based on their comfort level.

Chapter 1: Identification and Assessment of Agitation

- Identify the agitated patient
- Use a standardized scale to assess agitation
- Assess a patient scene for safety

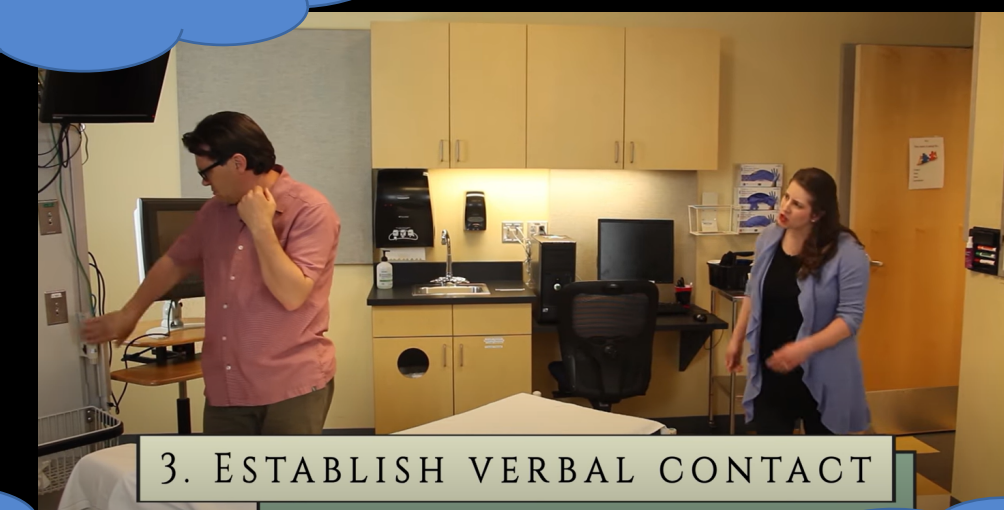


Evidence-based assessment

Environmental safety

Chapter 2: Basic Elements of Verbal De-escalation

- Learn the basic elements of verbal de-escalation



Realistic scenarios

Skills labeled on screen

Chapter 3: More Practice with Verbal De-escalation

- Gain more experience with the elements of verbal de-escalation



Managing countertransference

Chapter 4: Advanced Skills in De-escalation

- Learn strategies for managing a team during de-escalation
- Learn the elements of a team debriefing
- Hear techniques for managing your personal reactions to agitated patients



Engages clinicians of all skill levels

Chapter 5: Personal Safety and Escape Skills

- Learn personal safety skills for dangerous situations
- Feel safer when engaging agitated patients



Practical safety skills

Effectiveness

We conducted a pre-post assessment of this curriculum among 151 medical students required to use the curriculum during their psychiatric clerkship. Students' comfort, confidence, and sense of safety in working with agitated patients all significantly improved (Simpson 2020, PMID: 31863414):



Impact

All clinicians must be prepared to manage agitated patients. This peer-reviewed de-escalation curriculum has been adapted for free by healthcare institutions in multiple countries to improve the identification of agitation, support staff, and provide more effective treatment to patients.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by a Rymer Innovation Award from the University of Colorado Academy of Medical Educators. Drs. Rylander, Albert, Medley, Puening, Seefeldt and others are recognized online.