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 conscious 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.

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**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**

**Realistic scenarios**

**Managing countertransference**

**Skills labeled on screen**

**Chapter 2: Basic Elements of Verbal De-escalation**

- Learn the basic elements of verbal de-escalation

**How comfortable would you feel encountering an agitated patient in a hospital or clinic setting? (Somewhat/very comfortable)**

Pre: 17%  
Post: 81%

**How confident are you in your skills to begin verbal de-escalation of an agitated patient? (Somewhat/very confident)**

Pre: 17%  
Post: 87%

**How safe would you feel at the prospect of verbally de-escalating an agitated patient? (Somewhat/very safe)**

Pre: 28%  
Post: 77%

**Chapter 3: More Practice with Verbal De-escalation**

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

**Chapter 4: Advanced Skills in De-escalation**

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

**Practical safety skills**

**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

**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.

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