

In the Beginning: The Story of a Sim Lab and Resiliency

By Patricia F. Muster MSN, RN, NPD-BC, Designated Learning Officer, Darlene Delancey, Medical Center Director, Carol Noriega MSN, RN, CEN, BC-RN, Michelle Ward MSN, RN, ANP, Kathleen Brandi MSN, RN, ACNS-BC, NPD-BC, Samantha Stewart BSN, RN, Catherine Lester MSN, RN, CNEcl, Susan Bowman MSN, RN, Anthony Budhram, BS, Isaac Jenkins, BS, Karen Sklenarik, BS



2022: Department of Learning & Development Sim Lab Annex
Left to Right: Catherine Lester RN, Anthony Budhram Training Specialist, Isaac Jenkins Training Specialist, Samantha Stewart RN, Karen Sklenarik Employee Engagement Officer, Kathy Brandi RN, Mimi Ward, RN
Photographer: Pat Muster, DLO

The Albany Stratton Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) Simulation Center Medical Center Director, Darlene Delancey, had the foresight to dedicate space in a *Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN)* building for experiential learning. Her dream would be realized with a grand opening and ribbon cutting in July 2019, crushed by COVID in 2020 and then resiliently reemerge in 2022.

In November 2018, a designated learning officer (DLO) was hired and charged with setting up a simulation lab. The DLO operationalized the equipment the Albany Stratton VAMC possessed. Carol Noriega, a registered nurse (RN) nurse educator, identified and inventoried equipment we had and determined if it was operational. She found two huge boxes in the basement which contained a Laerdal Medical simulator, which was approximately 7-10 years old and a variety of task trainers. Additionally, nurse educators using the Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN) began creating and delivering education through simulation. We leveraged the free training

opportunities provided by SimLEARN and began to build relationships with the faculty and simulation technologists.

All departments within the hospital participated in equipment identification and procurement for the simulation lab. The goal was to create a patient room with all relevant medical equipment and the Laerdal Medical simulator, or 'Alex.' The entire organization supported the effort, and an in-patient



2019: Transporting the 're-discovered' task trainer to Bld. 67 Sim Lab. Left to Right: Carol Noriega, Sue Bowman, Michelle (Mimi) Ward
Photographer: Pat Muster DLO

room was replicated which included intravenous (IV) pumps, crash carts, bedside stands and a head wall.

The Albany Stratton VAMC Simulation Lab was opened on July 24, 2019 in the VISN 2 Network Learning Center (Bld. 67) to coincide with the VISN 2 Surgical Summit. The medical center director cut the ribbon amidst an enthusiastic audience. We began to use simulation in nursing orientation, designed a new employee orientation for environmental service staff using 'Alex' and began to engage physician learning with our high-fidelity simulator. We also supported the VA National Telestroke Program (NTSP) with a CODE Stroke physician interview simulation. During this time, we purchased multiple manikin simulators, a high-fidelity ultrasound simulator, head

walls, monitor simulators and were off on our learning adventure.

Then, COVID-19 hit! Adherence with COVID protocols severely impacted the sim lab. Most of our supplementary medical equipment, including the bed, was repurposed for use in the main hospital. We did, however, use simulation via task trainers in the intensive care unit to train staff on reducing exposure to contagion during aerosolizing intubation procedures.

Fast forward to 2022. We reconfigured the sim lab in Building 67 and created a SimLab Annex in the main hospital, complete with task trainers, a Nursing Anne simulator and an Alex 3G plus patient communication simulator. Though most of our original sim lab educators have moved to new professional opportunities, we are in the process of training new staff thanks to SimLEARN. We anticipate submitting a SimLEARN Facility Certification Application this year. We have come full circle, fully embracing the value of simulation in education for all levels of our organization.



2019: Main Building "Sim Annex"
Left to Right: Cathleen Keegan-Tejada RN, Catherine Lester RN (patient), Kathy Brandi RN
Photographer: Anthony Budhrum