



Simulation Training Drives Skill Enhancement in Critical Care Nurse Internship Program

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(Orlando VA Healthcare System Fall 2022 Critical Care Nurse Internship Program (CCNIP) Intern RNs participating in critical care scenario simulation at the Orlando VA Med Sim. Left to Right: Magdalena Pullen, Dannielle Viera and Jila Vazquez. Photo taken by Caroline Chu CCNIP director)

The Critical Care Nurse Internship Program (CCNIP) at the Orlando VA Healthcare System empowers Registered Nurses (RNs) with the essential skills and knowledge required for critical care nursing. Through a comprehensive curriculum, which includes hands-on clinical experience, simulation-based learning and preceptorship, the program prepares RNs for their transition into the demanding environments of the emergency department (ED) or intensive care unit (ICU).

Simulation-based training has emerged as a valuable tool in health care education, offering learners a safe and controlled environment to practice vital skills. In the CCNIP, simulation is strategically integrated into the curriculum to replicate real-life critical care patient care scenarios, with a specific focus on the unique medical challenges faced by Veterans in the ICU and ED settings.

Simulation provides a secure and controlled space for nurses transitioning into critical care specialties. Through simulated scenarios, interns learn effective communication with colleagues in response to emergent situations. Standardized patients, portrayed by staff nurses and nurse educators, enhance the fidelity of scenarios. Examples of scenarios include managing hyperglycemic emergencies, performing real-time medication titration calculations, responding to symptomatic bradycardia requiring external

pacing, handling cardiac arrest cases, addressing fall risks, conducting skin assessments and identifying and caring for suicidal Veterans. These scenarios aim to enhance interns' clinical judgment, decision-making abilities and critical thinking skills.

Close collaboration between the CCNIP program director and simulation coordinators is key to designing and executing the simulation scenarios. The simulation staff at the Orlando VA Healthcare System supports the operational aspects of the simulations, while the CCNIP director ensures that the scenarios align with the program's learning objectives.

Based on valuable feedback from previous cohorts, the CCNIP has increased the variety and frequency of simulation scenarios to ensure comprehensive coverage of critical care nursing challenges. The fall 2022 cohort of interns provided positive feedback, stating that the simulations had a lasting impact and helped them effectively apply their knowledge to real-life patient encounters. Simulation plays a vital role in the program, providing a safe and controlled environment for interns to practice and refine their skills. By exposing them to realistic scenarios, the CCNIP aims to instill the confidence and competence necessary for success in critical care nursing.