

The Impact of a Medical Improv Course on Student Confidence and Resilience to Feedback Ahead of Third-Year Clerkships

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INTRODUCTION

The transition to clerkships in the undergraduate medical curriculum is often seen as stressful by students.

There is a switch to on-the-job learning and there are many opportunities for failure, requiring that students have a ‘thick-skin’.

Part of the teaching during clerkships involves educators quizzing students to gauge their knowledge. Students must perform quickly under pressure, and if incorrect it may lead to embarrassment, impacting future participation.

Although scientific and clinical knowledge are important for clinical instruction, they alone are not enough to adequately prepare students for the clerkship phase, as communication skills are also assessed and are essential for success, yet rarely taught.

Despite the potential benefits, there isn’t a formal learner-centered, experiential communication course at WSUSOM.

WHAT IS MEDICAL IMPROV?

Medical improv is an increasingly popular training technique that adapts improvisational theater principles and exercises to develop medical skills such as:

- Communication
- Active listening
- Teamwork
- Adaptability

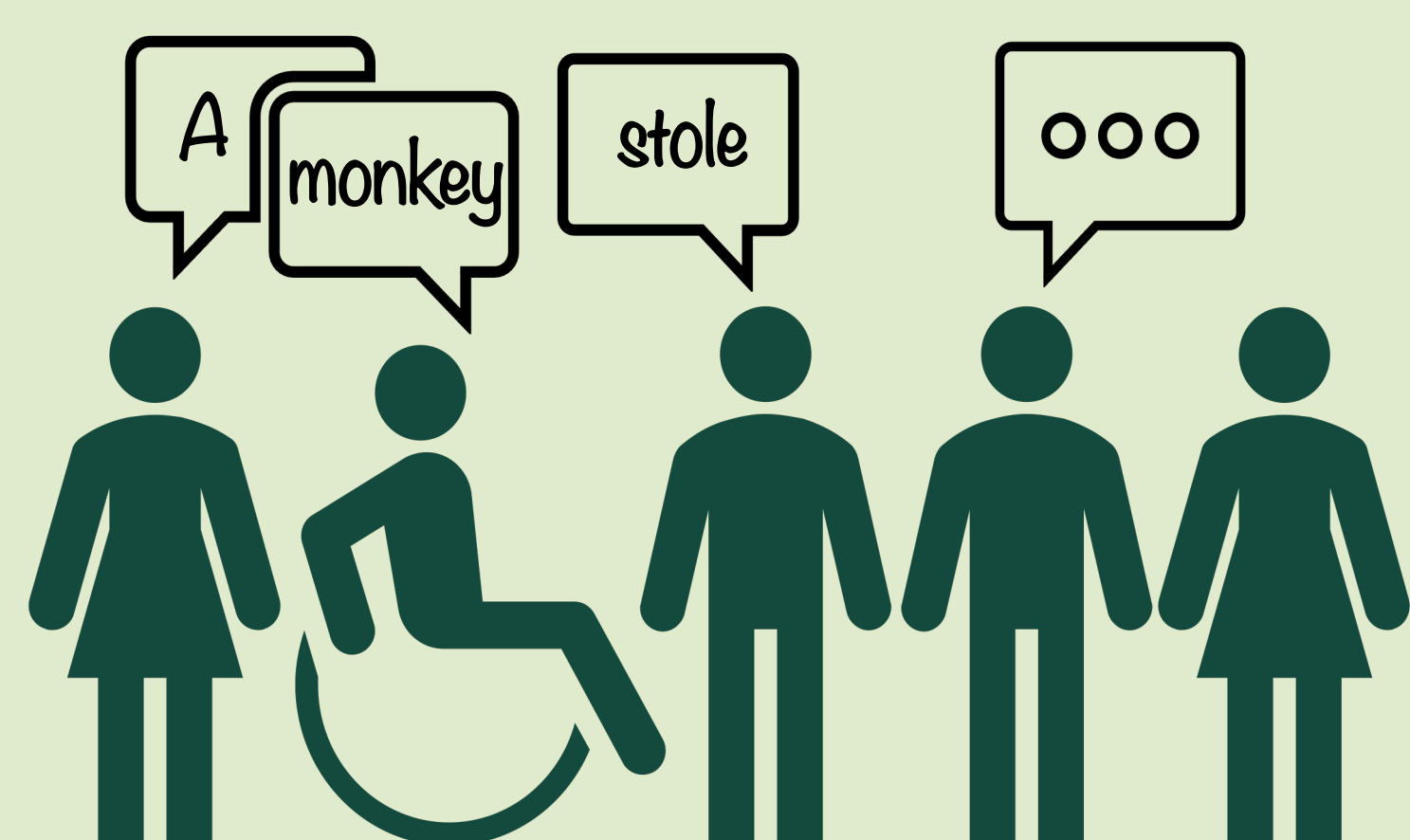
It is a form of cross-training. It allows students to develop communication skills without the pressure of clinical thinking.

There are no wrong answers in improv, and actors accept cues and dialogue to keep the exercise going.

Being able to think well, quickly, and in front of an audience is a defining element of theatrical improv and medical practice.

AN IMPROV EXERCISE: ONE WORD STORY

Participants take turns telling a story one word at a time given a place and theme.



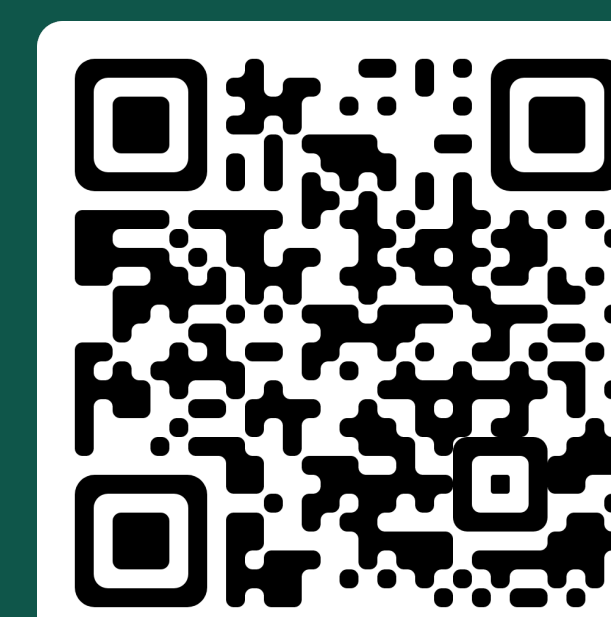
Skills developed:

- Listening
- Quick thinking
- Not anticipating what is next

Medical improv is a unique tool that can be used to improve medical student communication skills and confidence.

Being able to think well, quickly, and in front of an audience is a defining element of theatrical improv. By honing these skills, students will be able to comfortably answer questions out loud, improve communication with patients and colleagues, and succeed during third-year clerkships.

This project is a work in progress. Do you have any suggestions or wish to be updated on when the workshop is scheduled? Scan the QR code!



METHODS

A 1 hour medical improv workshop will be designed using Kern’s 6-step approach to curriculum development. An improv theater professional who is also a standardized patient in the Kado Clinical Skills Center will run the workshop.

Second year medical students at WSUSOM will volunteer to attend the workshop (expected n=50).

A pre- and post-survey will be administered using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach.

SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

5-point Likert Scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

- This class increased my confidence in myself
- This class improved my ability to deal with stressful situations
- I felt free to fail in this class
- This class improved my communication
- This class helped me develop as a future doctor

EXPECTED RESULTS

We expect that there will be a statistically significant improvement in:

- student confidence
- ability to think quickly
- resilience in accepting feedback

We expect that students will:

- have a positive experience during the workshop
- find it beneficial to their professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

Skills learned in theatrical improv can be transferred to learning and clinical practice. This workshop can improve students’ abilities to think quickly in high stress situations and to accept negative feedback from preceptors. There are no wrong answers in improv, and this can help students reconceptualize failure from being shameful into an opportunity for growth. Improved communication from the workshop can also benefit collaboration and the patient interview. Additionally, there is a potentially added benefit of stress-relief and improved student wellness. This workshop can help students achieve confidence ahead of their third year clerkships resulting in better student evaluations and consequently, stronger residency applications.

A study limitation is the volunteer self-selection bias which may affect the generalizability of the results. Outgoing students may be drawn to the theatrical nature of the workshop, as well as students that recognize communication as a skill they would like to develop.

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