Enhancing Student PT/PTA Teamwork Through Simulation: A Case Study

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References

Purpose & Background

Purpose: Explore how an intraprofessional simulation impacts student understanding of physical therapist (PT) and physical therapist assistant (PTA) roles, communication, and confidence when responding to an emergent clinical situation in an outpatient clinic.

Background:

Effective collaboration between PTs and PTAs is essential for safe and high-quality patient care.

Students have limited exposure to realistic team-based scenarios.

Simulation allows students to practice clinical reasoning and teamwork.

Case Description/Methods

PT and PTA students engaged in case-based simulation focused on communication and collaboration . Students completed voluntary pre and post surveys. Pre and post simulation surverys were analyzed for changes.

Preparation:
Pre-brief: discussion of roles, responsibilities, APTA supervision and direction guidelines

Simulation (1 hour):
PT and PTA teams review case and treatment plan
Standardized patients: suspected DVT requiring PTA-PT collaboration for clinical decision making

Debrief:
Discussion of communication, roles, decision making

Learning Outcomes

By the end of simulation experience, students will report:

- Improved understanding of PT and PTA roles, including responsibilities, supervision requirements, and collaborative function within the care team.
- Increased confidence in communicating with interdisciplinary team members and within the PT–PTA group.
- Increased preparedness to engage in team-based care, including delegation, feedback exchange, and shared decision-making.
- Increased ability to identify and apply PT/PTA scope boundaries during clinical decision-making scenarios.
- Increased confidence to function as a part of a PT/PTA team.

Outcomes

54 students completed both the pre and post simulation surveys. Responses were analyzed as independent samples using Mann-Whitney U tests.

Statistically significant improvements after the simulation were noted in four of five domains:

Understanding of role ($p = .029$)
Communication confidence ($p = .024$)
Preparedness for teamwork ($p = .034$)
Recognizing scope boundaries ($p = .017$)
Confidence to function as part of PT/PTA team ($p=.082$)

PTA students reported significantly higher scores than DPT students both before and after the simulation across all domains ($p < .01$).

Students with previous clinical experience in inpatient, home health, or outpatient settings demonstrated higher confidence levels post-simulation learning

Discussion and Conclusion

Research on simulation in healthcare education has emphasized interprofessional learning, while PT–PTA intraprofessional collaboration remains understudied.

This simulation improved PT and PTA students' self-perceived confidence and communication.

PTA students demonstrated higher baseline and post-simulation scores, suggesting possible differences in prior training or clinical exposure.

Intraprofessional simulation appears to be an effective strategy for PT and PTA students to improve:

- Role clarity and scope awareness
- Communication confidence
- Collaboration and teamwork readiness



