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### Standardized Patient Assessment of Communications in Pharmacy and Medical Students

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## Background:

The development of communication skills is a common curricular thread in health professions

Standardized patients (SPs) are used in more than 77% of pharmacy schools, 94% of medical schools, 82% of PA programs, and about 37% of nursing schools to help assess communications skills.

There are several advantages to using SPs to assess communication skills:

- SPs are unfamiliar to the students, which increases the fidelity of the simulation
- SPs stick to the script, facilitating standardization and improving reliability and validity
- SPs relieve faculty workload
- SPs offer a unique insight that provides valuable feedback into a student's overall assessment

**Primary research aim:** compare the assessment of student communication skills by SPs between pharmacy and medical students

**Secondary research aim:** compare the assessment of pharmacy student communication skills by pharmacy faculty and SPs

## Methods:

Communication skills for 2nd year pharmacy and medical students were evaluated using the same OSCE case



- 65 pharm students, 67 med students
- OSCEs were 1 month apart (med first)
- 8 SPs: 6 did both OSCEs
- Case was a patient with pre-diabetes about to be started on metformin

The New Mexico Clinical Communication Scale (NM-CCS) is a validated tool for assessing medical student patient communications

NM-CCS is based on the Kalamazoo Consensus Statement for patient-centered communication skills

These skills are embedded in the core EPAs for medical students which parallel many of the core EPAs for pharmacy graduates. Contexts assessed:

- Opening the discussion
- Building a relationship with the patient
- Gathering necessary information
- Understanding the patient
- Sharing information
- Reaching agreement
- Providing closure
- Patient satisfaction

**Standardized patients rate pharmacy student communication skills lower than medical students, but similar to pharmacy faculty**

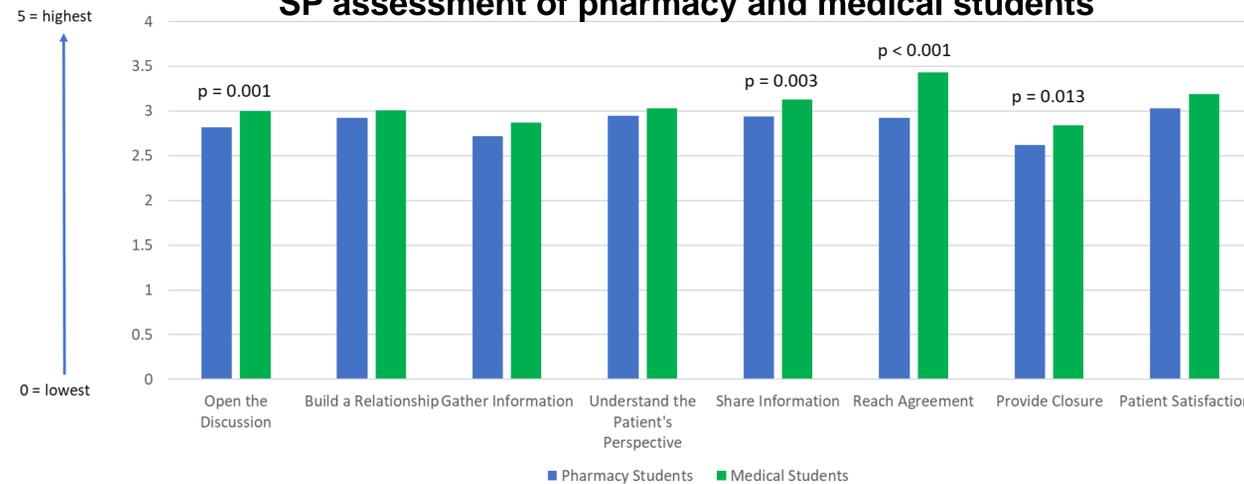
## Research Implications:

- SPs may be used in place of pharmacy faculty for evaluating pharmacy student communication skills
- The teaching of communication skills in the pharmacy curriculum may need to be modified
  - Pharmacy students did not score as well as medical students in several domains
- A validated tool for assessing communication skills in pharmacy students is needed
  - Modification of NM-CCS for pharmacy students?
- Opportunities for interprofessional OSCEs?
  - Same SP exposed to different students at different times during the same encounter

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SP assessment of pharmacy and medical students



Assessment of pharmacy students by SPs and pharmacy faculty

