

Debriefing: Blended Models

Debriefing. Many call it the most important part of a simulation session. In fact, INACSL has made the statement, “The evidence is clear that essential learning occurs in the debriefing phase of the simulation-based experience”. Much of this stems from the research being done in cognitive science, whereby self-awareness, reflection, and peer-to-peer feedback have been shown to promote understanding and the transfer of knowledge, skills, and attitudes from theory into practice.

The debrief following a simulation scenario really builds on principles of adult education and learner-centered teaching, and pulls from Experiential learning theory. It’s a time for collaborative learning between participants, where peers share ideas, gain insight into what just occurred, and have time to self-reflect and synthesize information. It’s a safe space in which people can learn from mistakes, gain confidence in what went well, and develop personal take-away goals.

I’d like to share my personal story. During a simulation experience, I was a first-responder in a code situation and as the first-responder, I went to the airway and also tried to be the team leader. During the debrief and self-reflection, I learned that I lost my situational awareness by trying to be task-focused and team lead at the same time. So, now I’ve taken that experience into my clinical practice and have become a much better team player and collaborative worker for that.

Due to the importance of debriefing, a good rule-of-thumb is to plan for debriefing to take twice as long as the actual scenario. For example, if you think the simulation scenario will run for fifteen minutes, then the debrief should be allotted thirty minutes of time. If you only have thirty minutes with a group, then plan for a ten-minute scenario and a twenty-minute debrief.

Because debriefing is so important, the bulk of the in-person simulation facilitator course will be spent practicing, and getting feedback on our practice of this important skill. Our job as debriefing facilitators is to guide the participants through a meaningful conversation – to bring everyone on the same page regarding what happened during the scenario, to prompt people to share what happened for them, to help reveal key insights, and help participants make connections between the sim and the real world – all while upholding the Basic Assumption, maintaining a sense of curiosity, and ensuring the space remains psychologically safe.

In our other two debriefing videos, we’ll dive deeper into the details of how to make this happen.