# Simulated Suicidal Role-Players Help Train Healthcare Providers

*Over 45,900 people died from suicide in 2020. To help healthcare providers reduce the number of suicides, SIMmersion created online role-players who are at risk*

COLUMBIA, MD, UNITED STATES, August 9, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Suicide is complicated and tragic, but it is often preventable. One study found that more than 80% of people who died by suicide saw a healthcare provider within a year of their death (see https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4026491/). So, how do we train providers to help patients who are thinking of suicide? SIMmersion, a leading conversation skills training company, partnered with the Education Development Center (https://www.edc.org/) and the Institute for Family Health (https://institute.org/) to develop a series of interactive role-play simulations to improve



Role-Player Taye Banks has been thinking about suicide needs to be assessed

training for this critical need. With funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (https://www.nimh.nih.gov/) Zero Suicide Healthcare Systems initiative, the team turned evidence-based methods into realistic practice opportunities where practitioners build skills without risking patient safety. The skills built include assessing the patient, motivating them to go into treatment, and safety planning. These role-play simulations are now available and preliminary studies show the training increases provider knowledge.

Online Asynchronous Practice for Conversations About Suicide Prevention

Practicing Assessments:
Every person who experiences suicidal ideation is different. The first step in providing care to

these patients is to understand their life and how it is being impacted by thoughts of suicide. Tools like the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale can help providers gain an understanding of a patient's experiences, but many providers do not know how to explore beyond the scale's basic prompt questions.

Role-Player Taye Banks is a fictional patient who identified that she is thinking of suicide in her pre-exam paperwork.

Learners practice talking with Taye to learn about her life, her thoughts of suicide, what's triggering them, and what's preventing her from making an attempt. Each time a learner starts a new conversation, the simulation randomly selects a different combination of these factors to help providers gain experience helping different patients. Following the conversation, learners practice documenting what they heard and identifying next steps. Learners also receive feedback on how well they connected with Taye and how much information they learned.

Role-Player Katrina Sanderson is considering seeking treatment for her thoughts of suicide

Practicing Motivating to Treatment:

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By combining the benefits of online training with realistic role-players, healthcare providers can now practice the skills they need to help prevent suicide"

*Dale Olsen, Ph.D.*

Unfortunately, not every patient who experiences thoughts of suicide is ready to receive treatment, and the ones who are ready may think they cannot get care because of money or time. Motivational Interviewing is a technique that can help providers guide a patient toward change by exploring their reasons for and against change.

Role-Player Katrina Sanderson is a fictional patient who is considering seeking treatment for her thoughts of suicide. Learners practice talking with Katrina to discuss the option of therapy, gain an understanding of what her life would be like with and without treatment, and understand her motivations and barriers to seeking treatment. Following the conversation, learners receive feedback on how well they reflected Katrina's thoughts, feelings, and emotions and how well they help her share reasons for wanting to change.

Practicing Safety Planning:

A safety plan is a list of coping skills that an individual can use to keep themselves safe when they start thinking about suicide. These plans can include everything from self-distraction to calling for professional help. Drs. Stanley and Brown (https://suicidesafetyplan.com/), who developed the suicide safety plan model, found high-quality safety plans reduce the likelihood of hospitalization for people thinking about suicide. But, many clinicians do not have the opportunity to practice building quality, individualized safety plans.



Role-Player Henry Douglas is thinking about suicide and needs a safety plan

Role-Player Henry Douglas is a fictional patient who has been thinking about suicide a few times each week for six months. Learners practice helping Henry create a safety plan that will work for him. Each time the conversation starts, the simulation will randomly select a list of coping strategies Henry will be willing to discuss and how effective they may be for him. Sometimes he will offer solutions that he doesn't think will actually work, and other times he will only offer a few working strategies. Following the conversation, learners receive feedback on how well they supported Henry's abilities to keep himself safe, explored the effectiveness of the safety plan, and explained how to use that plan.

Accessing the Online Training Systems

Learners can access these suicide prevention training programs, complete with written materials and real-time feedback, 24-hours a day, 7-days a week at https://training.simmersion.com Supervisors and administrators can assign training, track learner progress, and compile reports using SIMmersion's custom learning management system (LMS video).

Training Suicide Intervention

Traditionally, providers have learned suicide prevention skills in workshops with limited practice opportunities or in supervised sessions with real patients. Unfortunately, these models put patients at risk and limit the practice time and supportive feedback needed to develop long-lasting skills. Now, with online training with virtual role-players, clinicians can practice real conversations needed to build and refresh skills without making potentially dangerous mistakes.

Technology Behind Virtual Patient Role-Players

These role-plays were developed using SIMmersion's proprietary PeopleSim® conversation technology. PeopleSim allows the virtual role-players to have memory, emotion, and different needs or personalities, which combine to create conversations that are different every time someone trains. SIMmersion's script engineers work with subject matter experts to develop scripts with hundreds of learner choices and thousands of role-player video clips. The scripts contain statements used by experts with years of experience and common mistakes that novices make. After each learner choice, the technology evaluates the available role-player video clips and eliminates any that do not make sense based on the history of the conversation, the level of rapport between the learner and the character, as well as the personality and need selected at the beginning of the conversation. The remaining responses are given weighted probabilities and one video clip is randomly selected. The process for selecting responses, combined with character variation and user choices, means learners can practice as long as they want to build skills and gain confidence without putting real patients at risk.

About SIMmersion

SIMmersion's mission is to train communication skills faster and more effectively by combining the world's most realistic simulation experiences with interactive training content and extensive feedback. For more information contact SIMmersion by calling 443 283 2555 or online at www.simmersion.com/contact.

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