Assessing the Effects of an Online Debriefing Training Module
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Introduction

Although it may seem counterintuitive to some, student learning does not stop after the simulated teaching experience is over. On the contrary, students soak in vast amounts of information after the machines have been powered off, during debriefing sessions - perhaps even more so than they did during the simulation. However, the value of this additional learning component is contingent upon the effectiveness of the sessions. It is vital that the debriefing sessions are held in an organized and respectful manner in order for instructors to fully communicate students’ strengths and weaknesses without compromising students’ morale.

Purpose

Due to the great importance of debriefing sessions, the Simulation, Teaching, and Academic Research (STAR) Center staff decided to develop an online training module and to offer it to all of their instructors. The main purpose of this research project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the debriefing education that the instructors received.

Methods

The online course titled, Debriefing Essentials, was comprised of three main components: a pretest, a powerpoint presentation, and a posttest. The course materials were posted in WPAHS's learning management system and participants were able to work through the course materials at their own pace without any time restraints. The only restriction was that they had to complete the materials in that particular order.

The pretests and posttests were identical and were comprised of ten questions, five multiple choice and five true/false, each worth one point. These tests were designed to assess the students' knowledge of debriefing.

The powerpoint included in the course was a 37-slide presentation on debriefing, which covered the following topics: The Importance of Debriefing; The Structural Aspects of Debriefing; The Facilitator’s Role in Debriefing; The Debriefing Process; Debriefing Methods; and The Debriefing Setting. There was also a video embedded in the presentation, that showed both ineffective and effective debriefing sessions, giving the course participants an opportunity to compare the quality of the two sessions. Learners were asked to evaluate the debriefing sessions shown in the video, by using the Debriefing Session Evaluation: The Learners' Perspective tool, also developed by the authors. This 17-item instrument consists of statements to which the evaluator is asked to agree or disagree with on 7-point Likert scales. This instrument highlighted some of the key aspects of effective debriefing sessions and by having the participants use this tool, they were alerted to these important features. This tool is also what the students in STAR will use to evaluate the instructors themselves. So offering the instructors a chance to use this tool gave them an idea of how they will eventually be critiqued in their own courses.

To evaluate whether or not the online training module had an effect on the learners’ debriefing knowledge, the pretest scores were compared to the posttests scores. A repeated-measures t-test was used to statistically compare the two sets of scores.

Findings

On average, participants’ scores on the posttest ($M = 9.75$) were significantly higher than on the pretest ($M = 8.63$), $t(15) = 5.08, p < 0.01$. These results revealed that after the participants worked through the online course, their debriefing knowledge tended to increase. Figure 1. displays the mean pretest and posttest scores.

Discussion

The mean posttest score that participants earned after working through the online course was $1.13$ points higher than the mean pretest score. In fact, after the training, most of the participants ($75\%$) earned perfect scores on the posttest.

These findings revealed that the online training module was effective. Other training centers and institutions could implement similar programs to ensure that their instructors are properly educated on the importance of and techniques of conducting effective debriefing sessions.