Fall 10-16-2003

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Illinois Wesleyan University NEWS RELEASE

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October 16, 2003

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The patient is wheezing. His pulse is racing. A blood clot is moving to his brain. If nothing more is done in the next four minutes and nine seconds, he will die.

Illinois Wesleyan University nursing students huddle around the patient, attempting to save his life. "Congratulations, we just stopped SimMan's stroke," says Arleta DeDianous, director of the IWU School of Nursing laboratory, as the students breathe a sigh of relief.

Known as SimMan, the patient is an anatomical model of the full human body, or manikin, designed to realistically simulate many types of medical management and crisis scenarios. "He looks real, sounds real, and reacts like a real person," said Christie Ogden, a senior nursing student and laboratory assistant at Illinois Wesleyan.

SimMan is connected to a computer program that allows instructors to control his vital signs, alter his medical conditions with over 2,500 cardiac rhythms, program specific scenarios, and record their own sound bytes. Instructors are able to alter his physical condition and monitor the extent to which different medical situations affect students' critical thinking, self-confidence, knowledge, and nursing skills. "We are taught how to handle potentially life or death situations, and with training on SimMan, our preparation, education, and confidence will be better than ever," said Ogden.

Like a real person, SimMan's blood pressure can be taken automatically, auscultated (through a stethascope), or palpated (by touch). He also has a patented airway system, multiple inflatable bladders, the ability to clench his teeth, and a life-size intubation head with a flexible tongue, vocal chords, and trachea. In addition, DeDianous said, "I can hang a bag of fake blood and when students start an IV on SimMan's arm, they will actually draw 'blood' and see their successful attempt."

With regular access to SimMan, students do not have to wait until a clinical experience to practice a wide variety of procedures. Sophomores will use SimMan to practice taking vital signs, juniors and seniors will start IVs and give him injections, and he will be a major component of the entire nursing curriculum next year. If students feel uncomfortable or have

questions following a hospital visit, instructors can recreate hospital scenarios in the laboratory using SimMan for students to practice. In addition, state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment enables instructors to record training sessions and provide students with detailed debriefings.

Before SimMan, students performed assessments and checked vital signs on each other and used plastic manikins to prepare for clinical experiences. "The dummies are dummies. They don't have a pulse, they don't breathe, and you can't really assess them," said DeDianous. "But SimMan has lung sounds, bowel sounds, and a heartbeat."

SimMan can also run off of a battery pack, making him portable for scenarios outside of the laboratory. The military currently uses more than 300 SimMan units for training all over the world. Approximately 165 nursing schools are currently using the simulated manikin technology as well as 25 medical schools nationwide. Ogden said, "Experience with SimMan on an undergraduate level gives us an advantage for graduate schools and future employment. This type of training will set us apart."

Considering its size, IWU is fortunate to have the $50,000 simulated manikin manufactured by Laerdal, a Texas supplier of emergency medical products and training solutions. Delores Helsley-Ascher, a 1953 Illinois Wesleyan and Brokaw School of Nursing alumna, donated half of the cost for SimMan with a challenge to IWU alumni.

Helsley-Ascher received the IWU Special Lifetime Achievement Award at IWU's 2003 Homecoming for her many years of contribution to the School of Nursing. "Nursing is very important to me," said Helsley-Ascher, "and I have loved the profession and desire to do whatever I can to help the University continue with its program of excellence in the field of nursing."