

# Behind the Virtual Curtain



In what may be the ultimate in hands-on learning, simulation training creates immersive scenarios that are as close as possible to an actual clinical situation and provides the opportunity to think on your feet. Using computer feedback, manikins, and role-playing, simulation is used to teach theory, assessment, technology, teamwork, and skills.



*Kam McGowan, BSE, EMT-B, ensures that all the equipment in the Center for Nursing Excellence's simulation lab is running smoothly for nurse training sessions.*

The latest addition to Stanford's world-class collection of simulation labs, located at the Center for Nursing Excellence at 4700 Bohannon Drive, uses this approach to train nurses and nursing teams.

The Center's new simulation lab includes a suite of three rooms—a control room, where audio-visual and simulation equipment is run by instructors and staff; a simulated hospital room, where nurses practice their skills; and a debriefing room, where participants discuss and explore strategies for successful teamwork, communication, and the best in patient care in dynamic and challenging situations.

Simulation is a rapidly growing aspect of health-care education and provides a unique opportunity for nurses to learn from mistakes without putting patients in harm's way. The trick is figuring out how to provide the right level of challenge. A simulation that is too straightforward is not a worthwhile learning experience; one that is overwhelming does not create an opportunity to become better as individual providers or as a team.

The Center for Nursing Excellence's simulation lab is used for a variety of education programs, including Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), the Versant Nurse Residency program for newly graduated nurses, nursing orientation, and ongoing nurse training.

I work behind the virtual curtain, ensuring that the audio-visual and simulation equipment is ready to go and that the lab is ready for

immersive learning to take place. Being a Sim Tech is a lot like being a stage manager—my role is to make sure that the technology stays out of the way so educators can focus on the participants' actions and reactions during a scenario. I consider myself a “professional generalist,” using every aspect of my training as an engineer, information technology professional, museum educator, and emergency medical technician.

I worked at the Palo Alto VA Hospital's Simulation Center for three years and at the School of Medicine's Li Ka Shing Center for Learning and Knowledge before joining Packard Children's Hospital this summer.

I am also involved in the development of the simulation technology workforce at the national level. I am a past chair of the Society for Simulation in Healthcare's Technology Special Interest Group, a board member of SimGHOSTS (Gathering of Healthcare Simulation Technology Specialists.), and founder of the website Behind the Sim Curtain ([behindthesimcurtain.org](http://behindthesimcurtain.org)).

*—Kam McGowan, BSE, EMT-B, is the simulation technology specialist at the Center for Nursing Excellence simulation center.*