Simulated learning from the classroom to pharmacy placements

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INTRODUCTION
Simulated learning is used to enhance skill development and expose students to clinical situations they may not otherwise encounter. This research aimed to promote development and application of enhanced communication skills (motivational interviewing) through integration of simulated learning activities into the master of pharmacy fourth year course.

METHODS
Simulated patients were incorporated into sequential fourth year experiential pharmacy practice courses as part of the multidisciplinary Simulated Telemedicine Environment Project for Students (STEPS) exploring simulated learning through innovative technology in health discipline education. Simulated learning was then piloted in hospital placements and in an inter-professional activity with exercise physiology students. Scenarios reflected common practice issues (i.e. adherence) and issues less frequently encountered by urban students (i.e. rural scenario and telemedicine). Student motivation and confidence were measured pre and post activity on five and seven point scales for validated items and pharmacy specific skills.

RESULTS
Sixty-eight students are enrolled in the fourth year and student surveys were completed for two in-course activities (n=34, n=49), hospital placements (n=16) and inter-professional education (n=14). Student confidence in conducting patient assessment initially increased (3.60 to 3.95) and the majority agreed that simulated learning better prepared them for OSCE assessment. All fourteen students agreed or strongly agreed that inter-professional education better prepared them for collaborative management of cardiovascular disease.

DISCUSSION
Structured simulated learning activities improved student confidence and motivation and promoted development of enhanced communication skills relevant to pharmacy practice. Opportunities to contextualise skills during placement and inter-professional education revealed benefits which have implications for curriculum development.