

UBC STANDARDIZED PATIENT PROGRAM FACT SHEET FOR NEW SPs



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

This fact sheet will outline the UBC Standardized Patient Program and the role that Standardized Patients (SPs) play in the Faculty of Medicine.

What is a Standardized Patient?

A Standardized Patient is a healthy individual trained to portray a clinical problem or situation for the purpose of testing or teaching specific skills in the field of health care professionals.

Why we use SPs instead of real patients

Trained SPs are comparable to real patients and are better suited to the teaching and assessment process. Since SPs are healthy individuals, symptom presentation can remain stable and standardized. Levels of difficulty can be controlled and tailored to the level of learner being taught or assessed. SPs carry lower risk than real patients, since no inconvenience or discomfort is caused to real patients with real concerns. Finally, multiple SPs can be trained to portray the same case in a standardized way, allowing a large volume of learners to have the same experience and be individually and fairly assessed.

What is standardization?

Standardization ensures that all portrayals of a case unfold as identically as possible. SPs are trained to give responses and portray symptoms that are consistent among SPs and consistent from one encounter to the next. Responses must be consistent in content and in volume (the amount of information given at once). SPs are also trained to respond to unexpected questions in a standardized way. This enables us, as much as possible, to offer students a fair and standardized learning or assessment experience.

Important qualities in a good SP

Comfort with role playing: SPs must be able to naturally and believably portray the required patient and foster a sense of reality, even in challenging situations, such as a student-patient interview in front of a group of observers.

Non-judgment: SPs sometimes have to portray unlikeable characters and must be able to do so without prejudice.

Good memory: SP cases contain a lot of detailed information that SPs must memorize and repeat accurately.

Ability to take direction: To standardize, we direct SPs to change their portrayals to match one another.

Communication: In timed encounters, it is essential for SPs to offer concise and direct responses.

Strong judgment: Despite our best training efforts, SPs will sometimes be asked unexpected questions. SPs must be able to apply general training principles and provide benign answers.

Attention to detail: Raising questions in training sessions is essential to the process of fine tuning a case and case portrayal.

Reliability and commitment: When we have to replace and retrain SPs because of a cancellation or drop out, it wastes our time and jeopardizes standardization.

English proficiency: A certain degree of language proficiency is required for SP work. In timed encounters, questions must be quickly and easily interpreted and answers formulated and delivered in time as well.

Comfort with physical examination: Some of our SP cases involve non-invasive physical exams. SPs should feel comfortable being examined by exam candidates, as well as trainers in front of a group.

Recruitment and scheduling of SPs

Recruitment begins several weeks before a project, and is done by email only. When you receive a recruitment email, it is essential to reply as soon as possible, whether you are available or not. Once confirmed, you must make note of your training dates, times, and locations. Missing training sessions is unacceptable and may result in termination from the SP program database.

Most cases require two two-hour training sessions spaced a week apart. Sessions are usually scheduled for the two-week period preceding a project to ensure that information is retained. Difficult or complex cases may require extra training, and simple physicals may only require one session. When a case is especially demanding either physically or mentally, extra SPs are hired to allow for rotations and breaks.

Overview of different types of cases

Basic physicals test a student's ability to perform a focused physical exam. These cases include brief background information and minimal or no findings for the SP to simulate.

Physicals with findings require SPs to simulate actual symptoms, which must be standardized.

Basic histories test a student's ability to interview a patient to gather information. These cases contain extensive information for SPs to memorize. SPs may also need to simulate symptoms.

Complex histories require more affect than basic histories. These are often psychiatric cases.

Counseling stations require students to obtain relevant history and impart information to a patient. These cases are driven by a series of SP questions.

History/physical stations combine both interview and physical exams into one encounter, often with the presence of physical findings.

OSCEs vs. Communication skills

An OSCE is an objective structured clinical exam in which students rotate through a timed circuit of clinical cases. SPs are situated in clinic rooms and are examined or interviewed by a succession of individual students as they move through a circuit. There is a physician examiner in the room with the SP who marks the students on their performance.

Communication skills cases are used in teaching sessions that allow students to practice and refine their communication skills. SPs are interviewed in front of a group of students and the group tutor.

Payment

Payment is on a per-project basis and is processed via financial services. Cheques typically take 4-8 weeks to be sent out and are accompanied by a T4A slip. SPs are required to complete a project in order to be paid for it. The pay rate for projects depends on the complexity of the SP role and ranges from \$20 to \$25/hour. We pay a minimum of two hours per training session and minimum of four hours per project day. We do not pay overtime for project days.

Frequently asked questions

Who can and can't be an SP?

We welcome healthy individuals between the ages of 18 and 80. Individuals with serious or numerous medical problems may not be suitable for SP work. We also cannot accept any pre-med or medical students.

I work full -time. Can I still be an SP?

Teaching projects take place on weekdays with daytime trainings, so you would not be able to participate in those. OSCEs take place on weekends and evening trainings are sometimes offered to accommodate SP schedules. Evening trainings are usually scheduled from 4:00-6:00 or 5:00-7:00. We do not offer training sessions on weekends.

Do I need to be an actor to work as an SP?

No, though a background or interest in acting is an asset. Some cases require the use of actors, but a majority of cases are simple and straightforward enough for non-actors to portray.

How often can I expect to be called for work?

Our needs vary based on the demographics needed for each project. You may be recruited as seldom as once or twice per year or as often as a dozen times per year. We cannot guarantee any frequency of work.