

# Nurses keeping it real

Members of Sheffield Hallam University's nursing and midwifery department have won plaudits for their innovative use of cutting edge technology that helps student nurses to develop skills of empathy and compassion in their care for patients.

A team from the university's nursing department showcased a technology it has introduced into the curriculum called augmented reality at the recent Council of Deans of Health annual general meeting in Glasgow held for the heads of nursing and midwifery departments of British universities.

Augmented reality involves projecting a live video feed of an actor via an iPad on to a training manikin, which is a life-sized model of a human body equipped with mechanical processes designed to mimic biological functions such as heartbeat, urine flow and blood pressure.

Students hold the iPad up and will then see the manikin but its head and shoulders will be overlaid with a live video feed of an actor posing as a patient.

## 'Care and compassion'

The patient's details such as age, sex and the condition they are suffering from are communicated by the actor through the video feed and students then have to react to that individual's needs.

The idea behind the technique is that patient communication skills can be developed and tested in an environment similar to one students will encounter when they are working on a hospital ward.

Mandy Brailsford, senior lecturer in the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing at Sheffield Hallam, said that patient-centred nurse training that re-created real life settings improved the quality of training they were able to deliver.

"Students on the course spend 50 per cent of their time



A live video feed is projected on to a manikin in Sheffield Hallam's innovative training scheme for nurses

in university and 50 per cent on wards and what augmented reality allows us to do is observe how students might behave while they are on the job," she said.

"If a lecturer introduces a scenario and tells them that 'this is Joyce' it goes in one ear and out the other. But when the manikin says 'my name is Joyce' they remember.

"It also allows us to monitor how students show their care and compassion for the patients they are working with.

"For example, during a recent augmented reality session one 'patient' we worked on was an elderly lady. One of the students responded to her by saying 'don't worry, babes, we'll sort you out, love'.

## Realism

"That gave us the opportunity to ask her whether this was really how she should be speaking to an 89-year-old woman. The technique really does give that realism to our training."

Augmented reality was introduced into the university's

nursing and midwifery curriculum in 2011 following a public inquiry chaired by Robert Francis QC.

The inquiry, which began in November 2010, was prompted by concerns about poor standards of care at Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust between 2005 and 2009.

Among the stories that came to light were those of patients left lying in their own urine or excrement, call bells going unanswered, food and drink being out of reach and patient falls concealed from relatives. Many patients and relatives also reported being treated with callousness by nursing staff.

The public inquiry's recommendations were published as the Francis Report in February 2013. The report called for "every single person serving patients to contribute to a safer, committed and compassionate and caring service".

Following the inquiry, Jane Cummings, the chief nursing officer for England at the NHS Commissioning Board, and Viv

Bennett, director of nursing at the Department of Health, launched a three year strategy for nursing, midwifery and care staff.

## Principles

The strategy included a set of principles known as the 6 Cs – care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment.

According to Brailsford, the use of augmented reality plays a key role in helping future nurses meet these objectives.

"The Francis Report raised the issue about the need for medical staff to be compassionate and caring in the work they do," she said. "We were teaching the importance of this before the report came out but had always been looking to make patient assessment more realistic.

"Augmented reality allows us to do that. The research we have done has proven that the students start to interact and relate more with the manikin."

VIC MOTUNE