

Simulation (Modern Healthcare 4/14/03)

With medical errors and quality of care issues in the news, it makes sense for caregivers-in-training not to start out practicing on their healthy fellow students or real patients. Technology has come to the rescue.

HealthPartners, a not-for-profit HMO based in Bloomington, Minn., and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minn., have just opened the new HealthPartners Simulation Center for Patient Safety. It uses a human-patient simulator, state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and several high-powered computers to teach students how to work with patients without inflicting bodily harm.

There are a dozen large centers like it around the country, most at elite medical schools such as Harvard and Stanford universities, but the HealthPartners facility is one of the first partnerships between a university and a provider, says Carl Patow, vice president at the HealthPartners Institute for Medical Education, which oversees residency and continuing medical education programs at 331-bed Regions Hospital in St. Paul.

The heart of the facility is the patient simulator, a \$200,000 mannequin loaded with high-tech equipment and sensors that allow it to respond to treatment in much the way a human would. The patient

dummy comes complete with blinking eyes and the ability to sense a cold stethoscope on its chest. The 6-foot-tall dummy has interchangeable body parts, wigs and voice programming that can make it male or female.

The video equipment allows students to work on their skills, observe their own mistakes and make corrections.

Allowing physicians, nurses and staff-in-training to work together as a team on dummy patients is still a novel idea, Patow says. "The purpose of this center is to give our health-

care students and professionals more practice and thus more confidence, before they start working on real people."