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'Escape rooms' help MCC nursing students

TRIBUNE NEWS STAFF

When Mesa Community College nursing students go into the simulation lab, it can be quite nerve-racking.

During the past year, Diana Breed interim Nursing Department chair and nursing simulation coordinator and a teacher for 20 years, noticed students' anxiety level climbing more than usual.

"They go there to apply the knowledge they learned in the classroom, but students say, 'They walk in the room and all their thoughts leave their head. They knew it until they walked in the room,'" she said.

Either the students are uncomfortable and anxiety is keeping them from making decisions they would normally make or they don't have the knowledge

as much as they thought they did, she figured.

So to differentiate between the two, Breed and her co-workers tried to eliminate the students' anxiety by allowing them to be in the room without any evaluation at all.

An article about how escape rooms help develop teamwork and thinking sparked Breed's curiosity, but she had never been to one herself. So, she gathered a group of coworkers and went to an escape room nearby.

"We worked together as a team to come up with the ideas, we were really bad at it," she said.

Soon after, Breed started developing her own nursing escape room scenario.

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Mesa Community College nursing students gather around a patient dummy in a mock maternity room. (Courtesy of MCC)

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She investigated different types of locks and came up with hints.

One scenario takes students, who work together in a team, through two rooms. In the first room is a dummy of a man who is dehydrated with food poisoning, but the students don't know this. Breed and her co-workers, laboratory technician Nancy Sanchez Padilla and simulation technician Shayla Turner, observe the students, behind one-way glass.

"When we turn off the lights, we can see in there, but they can't see us," Breed explained. "So, we answer for the patients, then tell them what's going on. We answer the phone if they call the doctor."

During the simulation, students read the chart, ask the patient questions, find the clues, and give the correct dosage of medication or IV before they can open the locks and find the final key to move to the next room. It's set up like an escape room with hints along the way, said Breed.

The other room houses a "woman"

ready to have a baby.

The students are applying the knowledge they've learned in the classroom, said Breed. They're not graded, but given a formative evaluation.

Although Breed doesn't know yet whether the nursing escape room simulation helps reduce anxiety, she's received positive feedback from participating students.

"I would like students to recognize that whenever you're doing something, you're learning," Breed says. "It doesn't have to be stressful. It can be a fun, exciting thing. It doesn't have to be sitting down taking a test. The more you build your muscle memory, you're building a cognitive link. So, you're doing it in a fun atmosphere and that link will still be there when you need it under a stressful situation as well."

This is the second semester the nursing escape room is offered. It was implemented in 2019, but soon after the pandemic hit, it was put on hold.

Learn more about the MCC nursing program at mesacc.edu/departments/nursing. ■