

## Celebrating a Decade of Excellence: The Legacy of the SimLEARN Advanced Fellowship in Clinical Simulation

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*SimLEARN fellows in action: Engaging in hands-on simulation activities designed to enhance clinical skills, teamwork, and innovative solutions for improving Veteran care.*

As the VA Interprofessional Advanced Fellowship in Clinical Simulation (IAFCS) program ends, we reflect on its remarkable journey and lasting impact. Since its inception in 2012, the fellowship has played a pivotal role in advancing clinical simulation within VA, shaping numerous health care careers and enhancing patient care for Veterans.

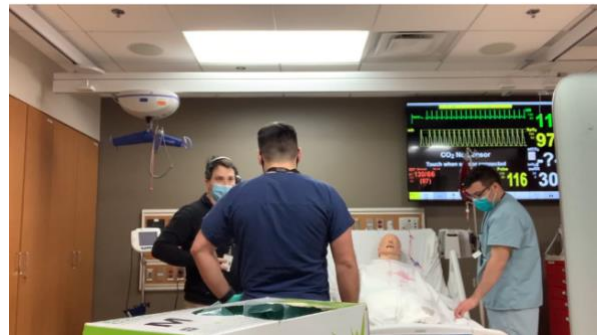
### Over a Decade of Growth and Innovation

Launched as a pilot at two sites, Pittsburgh and San Francisco, in 2012, the program quickly expanded. By 2013, Dayton, Durham, Gainesville, and Providence had joined, followed by Tampa and Minneapolis in subsequent years. The fellowship aimed to develop leaders equipped with the vision, knowledge, and commitment to implement, teach, evaluate, and advance simulation-based training strategies.

Fellows have made substantial contributions to clinical simulation within VA, with many alumni securing key roles. Notable fellows include Joseph Nadler, who joined VA Palo Alto after training in Tampa; Emily Boltey, now a Simulation Nurse Educator in Pittsburgh; Nicole Armitage, Women Veterans Program Manager in Dayton; and Mary Sturgeon, who became SimLEARN National Clinical Faculty and National Simulation Consultant for Dentistry after completing her fellowship in San Francisco. Sturgeon also served as the San Francisco VA IAFCS Fellowship Co-Director from 2022-23.

## Transformative Impact and Lessons Learned

The IAFCS program has been instrumental in addressing the need for trained simulation experts within VA. In 2009, only 30% of VA medical facilities used simulation; by 2015, that number had risen to 97%. Despite this growth, a 2015 survey revealed many sites still struggled to meet educational objectives due to a lack of trained faculty, highlighting the fellowship's importance in bridging this gap.



*SimLEARN fellows participate in an airway hemorrhage simulation, honing their emergency response skills to enhance patient safety and care for Veterans*

Supported by SimLEARN and the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), the fellowship provided robust instruction, mentorship, and infrastructure, creating high-quality learning environments. Fellows engaged in a wide range of simulation-based educational initiatives, led significant projects, and participated in national VA simulation efforts. Notably, the program adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting towards virtual simulation content delivery.

This comprehensive approach ensured that graduates were well-prepared to lead and innovate in clinical simulation, both within and beyond VA.

## Celebrating Success

The IAFCS program has left a lasting mark on the VHA and the field of clinical simulation. As the fellowship concludes, we celebrate the sites across the country that have embodied its mission to innovate, educate, and improve patient care. Their dedication to excellence ensures the fellowship's legacy will continue to inspire and shape the future of health care simulation.

Thank you to everyone involved for your commitment to excellence and for making a lasting impact on the care of our Nation's Veterans.

**Pittsburgh VA Medical Center**, led by Co-Directors Mary Ellen Elias and Lillian Emlet (and former Co-Director Jo-Anne Suffoletto), has been a hub of innovation. Their projects, including esophageal hemorrhage interprofessional team training and Veteran-facing naloxone training, have significantly improved team training and patient safety. The center has also participated in national initiatives, such as the VHA National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) Team Training and Telehealth Training which broadens the scope and impact of clinical simulation beyond local projects.

**Durham VA Health Care System**, led by Co-Directors Mary Holtschneider and Chan Park, has been at the forefront of integrating emerging technologies into clinical simulation. Projects include the development of gaming and artificial intelligence-integrated simulation tools which have the potential to advance faculty development and training, setting new standards for the use of technology in health care

education. The center's commitment to addressing bias in clinical algorithms highlights its role in advancing equitable health care practices.

**Tampa VA Medical Center**, led by Co-Directors Henry Park and Janet Sprehe, has demonstrated leadership in simulation training through various innovative projects. The center conducts diverse training activities including mock codes, stroke response, trauma nursing, and procedural boot camps. They have also participated in several collaborative projects such as the Activation Readiness Assessment of a new bed tower. Tampa's contributions have significantly improved the readiness and response capabilities of health care providers, ensuring better outcomes for Veteran patients.

## A Bright Future



*SimLEARN fellows collaborating at workstations during their fellowship, developing innovative simulation-based solutions to improve health care outcomes for Veterans*

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the IAFCS, we look forward to the future. The program's influence will continue through the work of its alumni, many of whom hold key positions within VA and beyond. The maturation of clinical simulation as a field has brought the fellowship to a natural conclusion, with the focus now shifting toward growing simulationists within VA staff's current positions, rather than recruiting for trainee status roles.

The lessons learned and networks created through the fellowship will guide SimLEARN in developing its simulation faculty development program. This initiative will build on the foundation laid by the

fellowship, ensuring the VA continues to lead in clinical simulation and education. As VA simulationists grow their expertise, continued faculty development will be essential to expanding innovative and effective simulation training across the VA health care system.

While the closure of the IAFCS marks the end of an era, its legacy will endure. The fellowship has laid a strong foundation for the future of clinical simulation within the VA, contributing to the ongoing improvement of health care for Veterans. We celebrate its achievements and look forward to the continued advancement of simulation-based training within VA.