

Director's Corner: SimLEARN in the Spotlight – The Power of Collaboration in Enhancing Veteran Care

By Eric Bruns, MBA | SimLEARN Executive Director



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In health care, recognition often comes as a quiet nod rather than a spotlight. But when our hard work is acknowledged, it reaffirms the value of what we do. SimLEARN's recent national recognition and our successful joint efforts with the Department of Defense (DoD) remind us that great achievements are born from teamwork and collaboration.

In July, CNBC featured the National SimVET Center (NSC) in Orlando, FL, highlighting its role in advancing Veteran care. For those unfamiliar, the NSC is the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) state-of-the-art simulation center, designed to allow health care professionals to practice medical procedures, test new technologies, and refine protocols—all without any risk to Veterans. The principle is simple yet powerful: nothing reaches Veterans unless it's been thoroughly tested and validated for safety and effectiveness.

The article spotlighted our collaboration with the Lexington VA Medical Center, which used the NSC and SimLEARN to develop and test "code SET," a new emergency protocol that may be implemented in VA hospitals nationwide. This national recognition of the NSC underscores the incredible work we do every day to improve patient care and safety. However, it's not just about the recognition; it's about what this facility represents. The NSC embodies our commitment to excellence, innovation, and continuous learning. It's a place where our teams can "fail safely," learn from those experiences, and emerge stronger.

While recognition is gratifying, SimLEARN's true strength lies in our ability to collaborate. This year, joint simulation programs between the DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have significantly enhanced the training of dental and medical professionals across various branches. These initiatives have broadened interdisciplinary training, improved readiness, and strengthened operational efficiency.

Key highlights include emergency preparedness training at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in Chicago and MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL, where we trained dental staff on critical skills and systems improvement using simulation. Additionally, our mass casualty preparedness training at Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Great Lakes in Chicago equipped Navy reservists with essential triage and trauma management skills.

These collaborations, led by Dr. Mary Sturgeon, VA SimLEARN National Simulation Consultant for Dentistry, and CDR Daniel J. Honl, Oral Surgeon and Director for Dental Services at NMRTC Great Lakes, have not only fostered a deeper understanding between DoD and VA participants but have also reinforced our commitment to high reliability and interprofessional teamwork. Through these joint

efforts, we continue to build a strong foundation for future partnerships, ensuring better care for those we serve.

As I reflect on these accomplishments, the recognition from CNBC validates the impact of our efforts, but it's the collaboration with our partners that truly drives our mission forward. Together, these elements are helping us build a stronger, more resilient health care system that is fully equipped to meet the needs of our Veterans and service members. As we continue this journey, I'm confident that we'll keep raising the bar, delivering the excellence our Veterans deserve, and setting new standards for health care training and innovation.