

Frequently Asked Questions

UW Standardized Patient Program

What is a Standardized Patient?

A Simulated/Standardized Patient (SP) is a person who has been coached to accurately and consistently recreate the history, personality, physical findings, and emotional structure and response pattern of an actual patient at a particular point in time.

The University of Washington employs Standardized Patients in the training and evaluation of health care professionals including: medical, nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, and public health students. As a Standardized Patient, you will be interviewed and examined, just as you would by your family doctor, by male and female health-care students. In the patient role, you may see several (4-12) students on a one-to-one basis during an evaluation session or there may be a group of students (4-7) working with you in a controlled teaching session.

How will I know what to say when the students interview me?

You will be given a “patient case” or script detailing the current medical problem, past medical history, family and social situation, and emotional state you will need to portray. You will learn to appear as the patient by using specific body language, movement, and responses to physical examination. You will also be trained to look for specific student responses and skills, to record them, and to give feedback to the student on their performance.

Will the students know we aren't real patients?

All students are aware that they are seeing SPs, and are asked to perform histories and physical examinations just as they would with real patients.

Will I have to grade the student?

No. You will be asked to complete a checklist as a record of the encounter, but you will not be asked to subjectively rate clinical skills. Some programs also require SPs to provide both positive and constructive feedback to the students based on their performance.

What type of physical examination will be done?

Students will perform focused physical examinations based on the patient case. These examinations may include: listening to heart and lungs with a stethoscope; pressing on your abdomen, neck face and limbs to assess tenderness; using a scope to look in your ears, eyes, nose and throat; taking your pulse and blood pressure; checking muscle strength, reflexes, range of motion, and gait. Breast, pelvic, genital or rectal examinations will not be performed (unless you also agree to work in the 'patient instructor' program. Please ask the CSA Manager for more details.) Invasive procedures (blood draw, X-ray, throat cultures) will not be performed.

Will I have to remove my clothing?

SPs are generally required to wear hospital gowns during the sessions. You may always wear underclothing under the gowns, and if appropriate to the patient case, shorts or sweatpants.

Will I need to know a lot about medicine?

No. Your patient case will contain all the information you need for portrayal and feedback.

Is my previous health history important?

It might be. Each patient is matched with a case – an SP who has had an appendectomy could not portray a patient with appendicitis. However, a surgical scar might not matter in a case about a headache, or wrist pain. Your answers on the medical database questionnaire will help match you to appropriate patient cases.

How are Standardized Patients selected?

As an SP, you will use a wide range of skills. You will need to role-play and work with a varied group of people. It is important that you are comfortable with your body and letting others touch and examine you. Strong written and verbal communication skills are required. Punctuality, reliability and flexibility are imperative.

Do I need to be an actor?

No, although many actors work as SPs. The focus is on providing the student with an educational opportunity, not on performance or dramatic interpretation. Playing a patient case is extremely repetitive, as exactly the same simulation must be done for every student encounter in a specific session.

However, many actors and non-actors find this work rewarding. You will contribute to the education of future health care providers, and many students are extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with SPs and receive feedback on their skills. SPs often become more comfortable with their own medical issues while working in the program.

How often would I work?

The work is temporary, part-time, and seasonal. SP sessions are scheduled according to student needs and program requirements. Some SPs will work each morning for a month, others may work every other week, still others may work three full days in a month. SPs who perform satisfactorily are given first preference for future work, depending on need and case requirements.

How much does it pay?

Currently SPs are paid an hourly rate (\$16.12) through the University of Washington payroll system, and receive paychecks twice per month. Due to payroll processing, work completed during the first half of a month is paid on the 25th of that month, work during the second half of the month is paid on the 10th of the following month.

What else should I know about being a Standardized Patient?

This job is not easy and it is not for everybody. It requires intense concentration while being interviewed and examined. You must be able to respond exactly as the real patient would. You must be able to maintain not only the patient's character but also simulate their physical condition during an encounter. When the encounter is over you must recall the student's performance and record it on a checklist. You may also be required to provide verbal feedback directly to the student. You will repeat these tasks many times in succession without change. Being an SP takes energy, memorization, discipline, concentration, excellent communication skills and a high level of comfort with your own health.

I'm interested in becoming a Standardized Patient. What should I do next?

Complete the attached application and information forms and send them to the address below. If you wish, please attach a resume and/or photo. We will contact you to arrange an interview dependent on program needs. Your application will be kept on file, and you may contact us at any time to update information.

Thank you for your interest in the UW Standardized Patient Program.

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