

# Simulation: Enhancing Forensic Nursing Skills and Confidence

**Prof. Naomi T. Chen\***

College of Health Sciences, Pacific State University, San Francisco, USA

**\*Corresponding Author:** Prof. Naomi T. Chen, College of Health Sciences, Pacific State University, San Francisco, USA, E-mail: naomi.chen@psu.edu

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## Abstract

Simulation is vital for forensic nursing education, enhancing critical thinking, communication, and confidence. High-fidelity simulations, virtual reality, and innovative approaches like escape rooms effectively teach forensic evidence collection, documentation, and assessment skills. Studies confirm these methods cultivate competencies and boost preparedness for complex cases, including specialized roles like *Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner* (SANE). Integrating standardized patients further improves realism and interpersonal skills. Overall, simulation offers safe, repeatable, and engaging environments crucial for developing proficient forensic nurses ready for demanding clinical practice.

## Keywords

Forensic Nursing; Simulation; High-Fidelity Simulation; Virtual Reality; Evidence Collection; Nurse Education; Critical Thinking; Communication Skills; SANE Education; Standardized Patients

## Introduction

Forensic nursing is a specialized and demanding field requiring a unique blend of clinical expertise, investigative acumen, and acute sensitivity to patient needs. Effective education in this area is paramount to prepare nurses for the complex scenarios they will encounter, ranging from evidence collection to providing care for victims of violence. Traditional pedagogical methods often fall short in replicating the high-stakes, unpredictable nature of forensic practice. This is where simulation-based learning has emerged as a powerful and indispensable tool, offering a controlled yet realistic environment for skill development and competency building.

One of the most impactful forms of simulation is high-fidelity simulation. This approach has been shown to be exceptionally ef-

fective for forensic nursing students. It helps them build critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence when they deal with complex cases, which is exactly what they need in forensic settings [1].

Undergraduate nursing students, in particular, perceive high-fidelity simulation as highly valuable for learning about forensic evidence collection. These immersive experiences provide crucial hands-on practice, helping students grasp the intricate nuances of forensic procedures in a controlled setting [3].

Furthermore, high-fidelity simulation significantly improves practical skills and confidence when it comes to collecting forensic evidence. This is crucial for handling forensic cases accurately and with the necessary precision [6].

More broadly, high-fidelity simulation effectively cultivates essential forensic nursing competencies in undergraduate students. Realistic scenarios allow students to practice critical assessment and intervention skills, preparing them well for complex forensic environments [7].

Beyond high-fidelity setups, virtual reality (VR) simulation is

making significant strides in forensic nursing education. A notable virtual reality simulation has been designed specifically to teach forensic evidence collection. Evaluation results suggest it's a great tool for nursing students, allowing them to practice these critical skills in a safe, repeatable environment, boosting their competency before real-world exposure [2].

Indeed, the effectiveness of virtual reality-based simulation on forensic evidence collection skills for nursing students has been confirmed through randomized controlled trials. These studies clearly show that VR is an effective method for enhancing nursing students' skills, offering a safe and engaging way to master complex forensic procedures [8].

Simulation isn't limited to traditional scenarios; it also encompasses innovative, engaging formats. For example, an escape room simulation has been successfully used to enhance learning in forensic nursing courses. This approach demonstrates how gamified activities can effectively boost student participation and critical thinking when addressing complex forensic scenarios [5].

Another vital area addressed by simulation is specialized forensic practice, such as the role of a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE). A scoping review has identified best practices for using simulation in SANE education, highlighting effective strategies that enhance skill acquisition and confidence for nurses handling these sensitive and critical cases [4].

Crucial skills like forensic documentation, often overlooked, are also effectively targeted through simulation. Creating and deploying scenarios focused on this vital skill significantly improves students' accuracy and thoroughness in recording forensic findings [9].

To further enhance the realism and efficacy of simulations, integrating standardized patients has proven beneficial. This mixed-methods study shows that involving real people makes scenarios more realistic, helping students develop better communication and assessment skills within a forensic context [10].

In essence, the literature consistently supports the multifaceted application and profound benefits of various simulation modalities in forensic nursing education. From high-fidelity and virtual reality to innovative gamified approaches and the use of standardized patients, simulations empower nursing students to develop the critical thinking, practical skills, and confidence necessary to excel in the demanding and sensitive realm of forensic nursing practice.

## Description

Simulation-based education stands out as a cornerstone for preparing nursing students to meet the intricate demands of forensic practice. It provides a crucial bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application, allowing students to hone their skills in a consequence-free environment before engaging with real-world complexities. This approach is not merely supplementary; it is increasingly recognized as indispensable for developing the nuanced competencies required in forensic nursing.

High-fidelity simulation is particularly impactful in this domain. It is considered super effective for forensic nursing students, significantly building critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence as they navigate complex cases specific to forensic settings [1]. One systematic review unequivocally supports its efficacy. These realistic environments are instrumental in cultivating essential forensic nursing competencies among undergraduate students. They offer a platform for practicing critical assessment and intervention skills, thereby preparing students thoroughly for the unique challenges of forensic environments [7]. This means students get to make decisions and see the outcomes in a controlled space, which is invaluable for learning.

When it comes to the specific and often sensitive skill of forensic evidence collection, high-fidelity simulation proves remarkably beneficial. Undergraduate nursing students who experience these simulations find them highly valuable for hands-on practice, gaining a deeper understanding of the precise procedures involved in forensic evidence gathering within a controlled setting [3]. Furthermore, a quasi-experimental study found that implementing high-fidelity simulation on forensic evidence collection significantly improves nursing students' practical skills and confidence. This enhancement is vital for ensuring accurate and reliable evidence handling in actual forensic cases [6]. The ability to practice repeatedly and receive immediate feedback in such scenarios reinforces learning and skill retention.

The advent of virtual reality (VR) technology introduces another powerful dimension to forensic nursing education. A virtual reality simulation specifically designed for teaching forensic evidence collection has shown promising results. Evaluation indicates it is an excellent tool for nursing students, enabling them to practice critical skills in a safe, repeatable environment. This effectively boosts their competency before they face real-world exposure [2]. The immersive nature of VR allows for a highly engaging learning experience, which is further substantiated by a randomized controlled trial. This trial concluded that VR-based simulation is indeed an

effective method for enhancing nursing students' forensic evidence collection skills, providing a safe and engaging pathway to master complex forensic procedures [8].

Beyond these advanced simulation types, various innovative and targeted approaches further enrich forensic nursing education. For instance, an escape room simulation has been successfully implemented to make learning more engaging in a forensic nursing course. This gamified approach effectively boosts student participation and critical thinking when dealing with complex forensic scenarios, proving that creative methods can also be highly effective [5]. Crucially, the often-overlooked skill of forensic documentation also benefits greatly from simulation. Dedicated scenarios can be designed and deployed to specifically improve students' accuracy and thoroughness in recording forensic findings, a skill paramount to legal and clinical integrity [9]. In addition, integrating standardized patients into forensic nursing simulations enhances realism significantly. A mixed-methods study confirms that involving real people helps students develop superior communication and assessment skills within a forensic context, reflecting real-life interactions more closely [10]. This broad spectrum of simulation techniques ensures a comprehensive and well-rounded educational experience.

Lastly, simulation plays a pivotal role in specialized areas like Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) education. A scoping review has identified best practices for utilizing simulation in this critical field. It highlights effective strategies that are particularly geared towards enhancing skill acquisition and building confidence for nurses who handle these sensitive and critical cases [4]. This shows that simulation is adaptable across various sub-specialties within forensic nursing, offering tailored educational solutions for distinct professional roles.

In summary, the diverse application of simulation methodologies, from high-fidelity and virtual reality environments to innovative gamified scenarios and the incorporation of standardized patients, comprehensively addresses the educational needs of aspiring forensic nurses. These strategies collectively ensure that students develop not only the technical skills but also the critical thinking, communication prowess, and confidence essential for impactful and ethical practice in forensic settings.

## Conclusion

Simulation is a highly effective educational strategy for forensic nursing students, significantly enhancing their critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence for complex cases. Various simulation modalities are employed, each offering distinct advantages.

High-fidelity simulation, for instance, is proven to be super effective, cultivating essential forensic nursing competencies and improving practical skills like forensic evidence collection. Students consistently find high-fidelity scenarios valuable for hands-on practice in a controlled setting, which helps them understand the nuances of forensic procedures.

Virtual reality (VR) simulation provides a safe, repeatable, and engaging environment for practicing forensic evidence collection, boosting student competency before real-world exposure. Studies confirm VR's effectiveness in enhancing these crucial skills. Beyond evidence collection, simulation extends to specialized areas such as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) education, where reviews identify best practices for skill acquisition. Innovative approaches like escape room simulations enhance engagement and critical thinking in complex forensic scenarios, while simulations focused on forensic documentation improve accuracy and thoroughness in recording findings. Integrating standardized patients further heightens realism, fostering better communication and assessment skills within a forensic context. Overall, simulation-based education is a versatile and vital tool, comprehensively preparing nursing students for the multifaceted demands of forensic nursing practice.

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