

Ethical Virtual Patient Cases

User Guide

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Introduction

Ethical Virtual Patient (EVP) cases were designed to facilitate learning in the context of medical and healthcare schools. The suite of cases that were upgraded for the G4.5 project were originally devised to be used in small or large group teaching contexts, but they were also created in such a way that they could be used in a self-directed learning context too. In what follows I provide a brief “user guide” which will hopefully enable educators to gain a better of grasp of the myriad different ways that these cases can be deployed in the learning environment.

Practical Details

EVP cases are incredibly easy to use in a practical sense. The cases used in the G4.5 project are available (for free) on our website ([www.](http://www.sgu.ac.uk)), the JISC website ([www.](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)) and also on our App (Apple and Android). Once the case has been accessed or downloaded, students simply need to read through each page (technically called a “node”) or watch each scene if using the video versions of the cases and then either click either on the “continue” button or choose from the range of management decisions (technically called “options”) to move onto the next page/scene. This process is then continued until the end of the case. Some of the cases are “branched” which means that when students choose one option over another one they will

Using EVPs

EVPs are a new pedagogical tool and there is, as yet, no consensus about how they should be used. Indeed, one of the goals of the G4.5 project was to find out how different educators would use the cases and to find out which method would work best. In a very general sense EVPs could be used in any of the following circumstances: (a) large group teaching, (b) small group teaching and (c) self-directed learning sessions. In each of the former situations students could be enabled to use the EVP without much intervention from the educator and, in the latter situation, students could either work through the case on their own or in a small group.

At SGUL we have used the EVP cases in large group session, small group sessions and in self-directed learning. With regard to self-directed learning, we generally inform students at the end of a large or small group session that there is an EVP available which links to the topic of the session that we have just given and that they should work through these cases in order to see how some of the theory that we have just been discussing can be applied in practice. We advise them that the cases do not provide definitive “answers” and that the primary goal of the cases is to stimulate debate and, as such, they would be better using the cases in small groups. However, we also tell them that most of the cases do provide some hints and tips about the kinds of ethical, professional and legal concepts that need to be taken into account when analysing a case from an MLE perspective. In the future, we would like to amend the cases in order to make them more suitable for self-directed learning. For

example, we could create “pop up boxes” to prompt students to think about certain key issues before they actually make their final decisions.

In large group sessions we have primarily used EVPs in hour long lectures where half the lecture is devoted to traditional material and the other half is devoted to EVPs. However, in theory, the EVP could dominate the entire lecture or could be used for only 10 minutes. This partly depends on the length of the EVP and whether the goal of using the EVP is simply to illustrate on ethical issue or many. Where EVPs are used in large groups the preferred method has been to ask one student to read out each node (if the EVP is text based) and then ask each student to turn to the person(s) sitting next to them to discuss the various options available. Once the students have had a chance to discuss the issues a wider, whole-group, based discussion takes place with the lecturer challenging the analysis of the students and encouraging the students to challenge each other’s reasoning. Once the lecturer is happy that most of the core issues have been covered a vote is taken (a show of hands is the simplest method, but electronic voting devices can also be used) and the majority determines which option is taken. The amount of analysis permitted/encouraged and the amount of intervention from the lecturer can obviously be varied substantially depending on the time available. In my experience a sufficiently large and motivated group of students will work out most of the issues for themselves, but the lecturer’s presence is useful to press certain issues and to regulate the debate.

In small group sessions we have primarily used EVPs in 2 hour long lectures where half the session is devoted to debates or other forms of small group work and the other half is devoted to EVPs. Again, in theory, an EVP could just be used for a 10 minutes in a small group or could dominate the entire session and effectively be the focus of the session. In small groups it is easier to divide the students into small sub-groups to discuss the case thoroughly, but it also possible for the whole group to analyse each node and set of options as one group. Which method works better depends on how confident each member of the group is. My experience suggests that quieter and less confident students are more willing to discuss options in sub-groups of 2 or 3 people. They can then be encouraged to contribute to the wider group discussion by letting them know during the smaller group discussion that they are making valid points.

EVPs in action

In 2010 I video recorded the first lecture that I gave using an EVP in a large group setting. In 2012, as part of the G4.5 project, Bryan Vernon also recorded one of the large group teaching sessions that he gave using a different case. These two videos have been edited to preserve the confidentiality of the students, but watching the edited versions should give people an idea of how EVPs work in a technical sense and how two different academics used them in two different educational settings. These videos are available here:

Carwyn’s Video (SGUL): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVfJ8AqGrRg>

Bryan’s Video (Newcastle): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yixt8xzfFKk>