Following the publication of the new standards for pre-registration nursing programmes, approved education institutions (AEIs) have been given more freedom to deliver courses in innovative ways, without being hindered by process requirements that restrict delivery (Leigh, Rowe and Burke, 2019). Ultimately, we as academics have been tasked with preparing nursing students for the challenges of the 21st century and the traditional education curriculum design of classroom-based teaching creates barriers that underpin nursing practice. This freedom of innovation gives AEIs many opportunities to develop future nurses that are prepared for ever changing and challenging environments found within clinical practice.

Simulation has increasingly become a popular pedagogical approach within nursing education and research has shown that simulation-based learning has strong educational effects, particularly strong within the psychomotor domain (Kim, Park and Shin, 2016). Within the last couple of decades, huge technological advancement that provides realistic opportunities for simulation have become more readily available, although this seduction of new technology may encourage simulation-based education to become more of a fashion, possibly lacking in a pedagogical foundation.

More recently we have seen the development of new innovative technologies such as virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR). This technology uses computer generated simulation that can be seemingly interacted with, through the use of electronic equipment such as a headset and handsets. Academics are repeatedly challenged to source innovative methods to supplement teaching and learning, and the COVID-19 pandemic has placed extra stressors on academics to deliver teaching in a virtual environment leading to many higher education institutions using this technology on their programmes.

Accessibility, flexibility in learning, and an interactive learning environment are some of the many benefits of VR highlighted by emerging studies. VR has also proven to be effective for skills such as cannulation. Skills acquisition within practice can often be complicated and rely on students being in the ‘right place – right time’ but students can now potentially undertake this learning in their own homes at a time that suits them with no limit on repetition and time pressures. Another clear benefit is equity of experience, each student has the same learning experience with up-to-date clinical knowledge backed by evidence. A recent systematic review of 14 studies evaluating the use of VR technology on pre-registration nursing programmes, found that this technology improved knowledge and that it was more effective that conventional training methods (Woon *et al.*, 2021). Interestingly, not only is there evidence of improved learning outcomes but nursing students also perceive this type of learning as a more positive learning experience (Farra, Smith and Ulrich, 2018).

While there are many clear benefits of VR, there are many challenges that academics face with the implementation of such programmes. Serious consideration needs to be made about the cost of such products, hardware is often expensive and can become quickly outdated, not to mention the licence fees associated with each student. VR technology is still relatively new, and support may be required in the setting up and using of the technology and VR itself can cause motion sickness in a small percentage of people. Additionally, technical issues can often inhibit the student learning experience, slow internet speed or lack of sufficient hardware needs to be addressed at the start of programme development.

The use of innovative technologies within higher education will continue to grow, the demand for new ways of learning in my opinion has never been so great, however VR technology that is used inappropriately within the teaching environment is no better than traditional models of teaching (Aebersold, 2018). Academics need to continue to explore its place within the pre-registration nursing curriculum and not see it as a quick fix to this desire for virtual learning. Although from my experience VR/AR has the potential to drastically improve critical thinking and skills acquisition for nursing students and develop nurses that are prepared for the challenges of delivering healthcare in the 21st century.

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