



# Improv(ing) Resident Communication

## An Innovative Curriculum for the Community Advocacy Rotation

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### Background

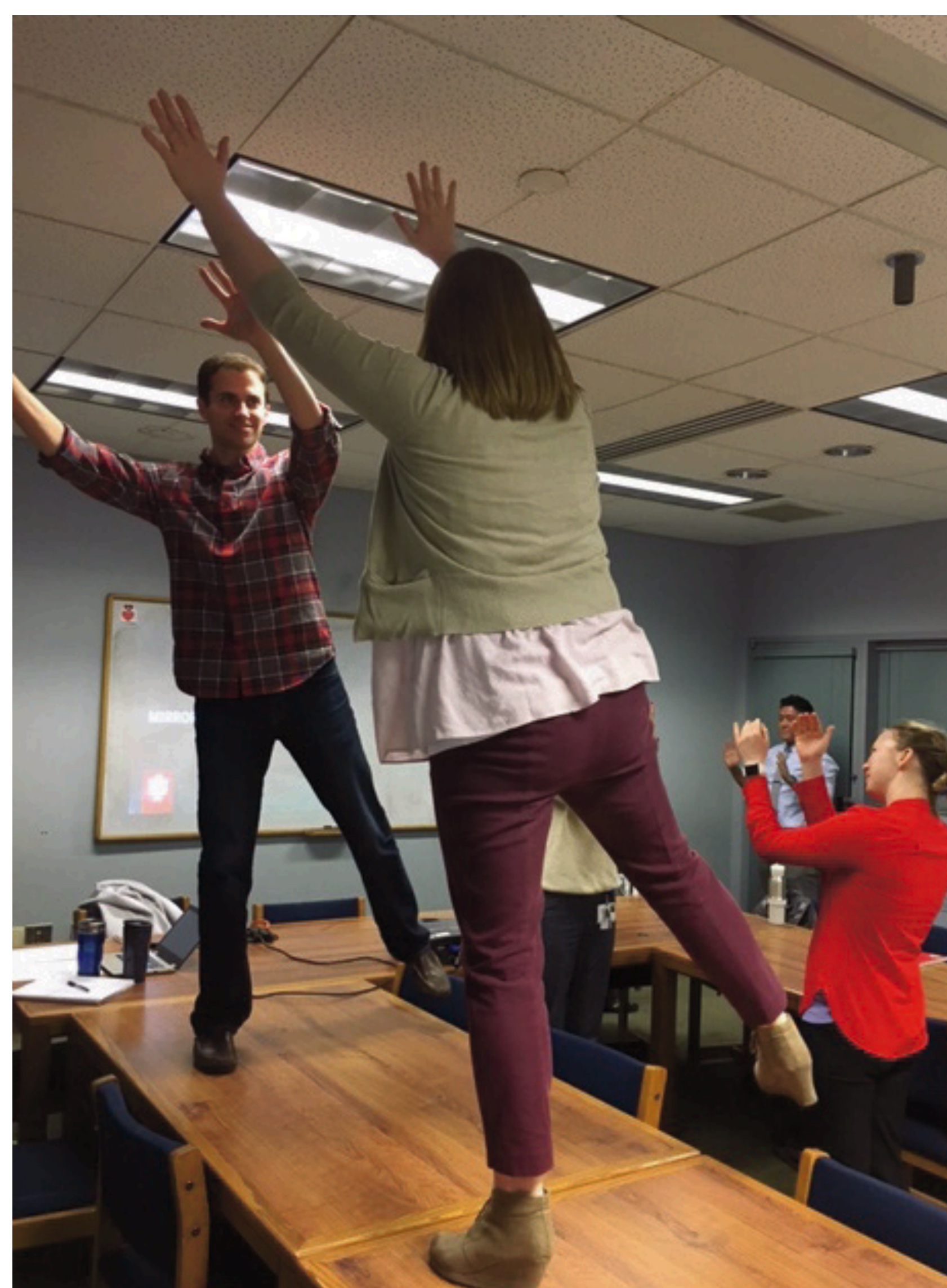
For physicians today, the communication landscape is complex. The public turns to multiple sources for information including friends, the internet, and social media. Physicians must regularly correct information printed from WebMD or Google. Research supports that misinformation is more damaging than ever.<sup>1</sup> However, a recent report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine<sup>2</sup> cautions practitioners against “the deficit model,” assuming that simply more and clearer information will lead to better decision-making by the public. Addressing this issue is critical for community advocacy, a core tenet of pediatrics.

### Objectives

Informed by successful programs for scientists, physicians, and students,<sup>3-4</sup> we designed a curriculum based on techniques of improvisational theater to train pediatric residents (PRs) to communicate more spontaneously, responsively, and engagingly. This approach treats communication as a translational process of meaning-making, rather than an act of information dissemination.<sup>5</sup>

### Applied Improvisation

- Yes, and...
- Follow the follower
- There are no mistakes
- Make your scene partner look good



### Workshop Overview

#### Part 1: Improvisation for Physicians

Session one helps learners be more direct and dynamically responsive communicators. The session employs improvisational theater techniques designed to help learners speak about health topics effectively and responsively with multiple audiences, from peers and professors to family members and policymakers. The exercises will help learners practice connecting with an audience, paying dynamic attention to others, reading nonverbal cues, and responding freely without self-consciousness.

#### Part 2: Distilling Your Message

Session two introduces principles of clear communication and features experiential exercises through which learners practice speaking clearly and vividly about health in ways lay audiences can understand and appreciate. Learners practice defining their communication goals, identifying main points, explaining meaning and context, responding to questions, and using storytelling techniques to enliven messages.

#### Part 3: Partnering with the Community

This session equips learners for shared meaning-making and collaboration with community partners. These methods are particularly useful in community-based participatory advocacy because they level the playing field between experts and community members. Activities focus on developing trust, opening lines of communication, and sharing expertise in a way that values and respects the lived experiences of community members.

#### Part 4: Media Training

In the fourth session, learners practice the skills they learned in the previous sessions during interviews with a journalist. Participants will practice planning, developing, and delivering an engaging message about a complex topic.

### Sample Comments

What is the “take home message” from today’s program?

“ The greatest currency in communication is understanding.

Communication can have a huge impact on effective medical care and relationships.

Personalization/storytelling are the key to engaging and connecting with patients, families and peers. ”

### Program Evaluation

As a result of attending this program, I:	Mean Scores
am aware of the importance of listening to understand my audience’s needs	4.79
feel more confident in my ability to listen to audience concerns	4.53
know how stories help a speaker to connect with an audience	4.68
feel more confident in my ability to gauge audience responses and modify my communication plan to better meet their needs	4.36
developed more effective strategies to communicate my ideas	4.7
N=55, on a five-point Likert scale where 5=strongly agree and 1=strongly disagree	

### Conclusions

Preliminary results indicate gains in confidence and skill. 74% of PRs rated their level of familiarity with communication strategies as average or below at the beginning of the session; and most (83%) agreed that they had learned a great deal of new information. Highest means were reported in listening and overall communication strategy. This type of training encourages PRs to position themselves as trusted experts and partners in making meaning of health information. The importance of developing these skills is underscored by current issues such as the vaccination and obesity crises. Empowering a new generation of pediatricians to bridge the communication gap created by new technology and data sources will ensure effective ongoing advocacy and movement toward a healthier pediatric population.

### References

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