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## ***Dwell*<sup>™</sup>: A Tabletop Simulation to Experientially Learn Poverty-Related Struggles**

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**Abstract:** Poverty impacts the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals. It is certain that health care providers will encounter patients navigating an impoverished reality; however, few have the necessary skills to fully assist these individuals. *Dwell*<sup>™</sup>, a tabletop poverty simulation experience, was created with the goal of fostering players' development of empathic service and care skills. In the game, players take on a character and household and have to stay afloat for a simulated 4-week in-game period. By engaging in perspective-taking as part of a facilitated experiential learning tool with compulsory debrief, health care students learn important lessons that can drastically improve their interactions with economically disadvantaged patients and thus enhancing patient care and professional success. The game has been evaluated with positive outcomes including when compared against other simulation-based tools addressing poverty.

### **Design Goals**

Tabletop simulation games allow experiential learning in which players are able to take action, see outcomes of those actions, and then reflect and debrief on the impact of their decisions. In particular, perspective-taking allows a person to play through the lens of someone else's perspective and lived experience. This in turn may allow players to gain compassion for, reduce bias towards, and increase respect for those living in poverty - including when providing them care in a health setting. The facilitated learning experience designed around playing *Dwell*<sup>™</sup> includes periodically sharing real-world facts and statistics that relate situational poverty to in-game events along with periodic built-in reflection phases in order to fully anchor important concepts through group dialogue, contemplation, and debriefing.

The goals for *Dwell*<sup>™</sup> include:

- Discuss how poverty impacts health, healthcare choices, and healthcare access
- Share facts and statistics about how poverty impacts people that align with game scenarios
- Apply greater empathy when caring for others who are economically disadvantaged
- Begin to develop new strategies to help educate and connect economically disadvantaged people with community resources

### **Game Description**

*Dwell*<sup>™</sup> accomplishes these objectives as a tabletop game in which players roleplay and navigate the urban city of Dwellville over the course of a simulated month, one week at a time, and as one of 5 characters trying to meet their long- and short- term goals to stay afloat financially and healthwise. In *Dwell*, players take on the role of the primary member of a single or multi-person 'household' and are provided daily and longer term goals, current living and working arrangements, and initial possessions and money available. The design of the game and the overall learning experience connects players to poverty's impact on one's health, livelihood, communities, and families through perspective-taking. As such, the game also reminds players how limited choices are when a person or family is economically constrained.

In addition to exploring day-to-day life as ‘residents’ of Dwellville, players also participate in regular “reflections” (on “Saturdays” at the end of each in-game week) during which they are encouraged to talk as their game character (i.e. in the first person) with the other players at their table about their experiences during that simulated week of play: what were the successes and challenges, how are they planning to meet their goals in the next week, etc. Additionally, players select a category and share a did-you-know statistic or fact on “Sunday” from an online fact library, curated and constructed by the game development team, and then talk about how it pertains to their in-game experience. Finally at the end of the game, players participate in a larger debrief that allows them to talk about and compare their extended experiences as each character. Players are also encouraged to reflect upon and share how this experience may change future interactions with people who are economically disadvantaged.

Given the importance of educating future professionals in the fields of healthcare and other education about the implications of poverty, the *Dwell* team’s goal was to create a game for health care education that does not require extended coordination and planning or a significant amount of human capital to run, especially in comparison to similar tools currently used for health education, which do not utilize in-game points of reflection or “Did You Know?” poverty facts like *Dwell*. Published findings show higher empathy towards those living in poverty by students who played *Dwell* as compared to those who played another simulation-based tool with similar educational goals (Sanko et al, 2021).

Individuals working with poverty stricken people require a much greater understanding of the global and often life-long impacts that being poor has particularly on health. By playing *Dwell*, participants perspective-take and experience how poverty influences their ability to live a healthy life and access healthy resources. An emphasis on facilitated reflection and debrief are critical to the *Dwell* educational experience. While the initial focus was on educating students studying in health care related fields, there has been much broader interest in the game, from multidisciplinary university programs to middle school Montessori programs. This broader audiences’ participation in playing the game can further promote the development of empathy and compassion towards those living with financial strain and understanding their unique challenges beyond a health care setting.

### **Game Links**

These are links to relevant game content, including a presentation file that will help the facilitator explain how to play the game to a group of players.

- [Facilitator’s How to Play slide presentation with images of game components](#)
- [Sample household booklets \(unique to one of five characters\)](#)
- [Did You Know facts and statistics deck used during in-game Sunday ‘Did You Know’ events](#)

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### **References**

Sanko JS, Matsuda Y, Salani D, Tran L, Reaves R, Gerber K. (2021, January). A comparison of learning outcomes from two poverty simulation experiences. *Public Health Nurs.* 2021;00:1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12853>