

No dummies here ...

Lab nets hi-tech mannequins

By DAVE PIZER

A 76-YEAR-OLD man complaining of shortness of breath is lying on the bed.

He lives alone and apparently hasn't been eating properly lately. Two nursing students armed with stethoscopes are tending to him, checking his breathing.

On his right side, a wheezing sound is detected; his chest slowly rises and falls. On the man's left side, his breathing produces a crackling sound.

A few minutes ago, his heartbeat had slowed down a few ticks.

Although he may be suffering from congestive heart failure, there is no way the patient will die. In fact, the patient isn't even a person, but a state-of-the-art, anatomically accurate mannequin.

The wheezing mannequin was being treated by a couple of nursing students in Algonquin College's new Health Science Simulation Lab. The lab is filled with other mannequins that can simulate a variety of medical symptoms and conditions with striking realism.

Pricey units

The most expensive models, which cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000, allow a technician behind a glass barrier to speak on behalf of the patient as students assess its condition. The students can also record themselves as they treat a patient and then burn the data onto a CD to assess their performance later.

Algonquin College held the lab's grand opening yesterday afternoon. It's the first of its kind in Canada.

"This type of training will never replace on-site clinical training, but it will allow stu-

dents to be much more skill-oriented and much more confident in their skills when they do go into the clinical setting," said Marie Cormier, dean of the School of Health and Community Studies.

The lab was buzzing with activity yesterday.

One group of students in lab coats tended to a diabetic mannequin with tubes coming out of its side that had recently been stitched up after having a mastectomy. Another mannequin, a child, was letting out a nasty cough.

Another mannequin named Noelle was in labour and having contractions.

'Very realistic'

"It's very realistic and it's very good practice for your clinical skills," said Shelley Patrick, a fourth-year bachelor of nursing student who has also treated a real patient in labour.

"You can listen to the fetal heart rate. You can program it so that the pushes are longer or shorter and you can program a problem in the birth."

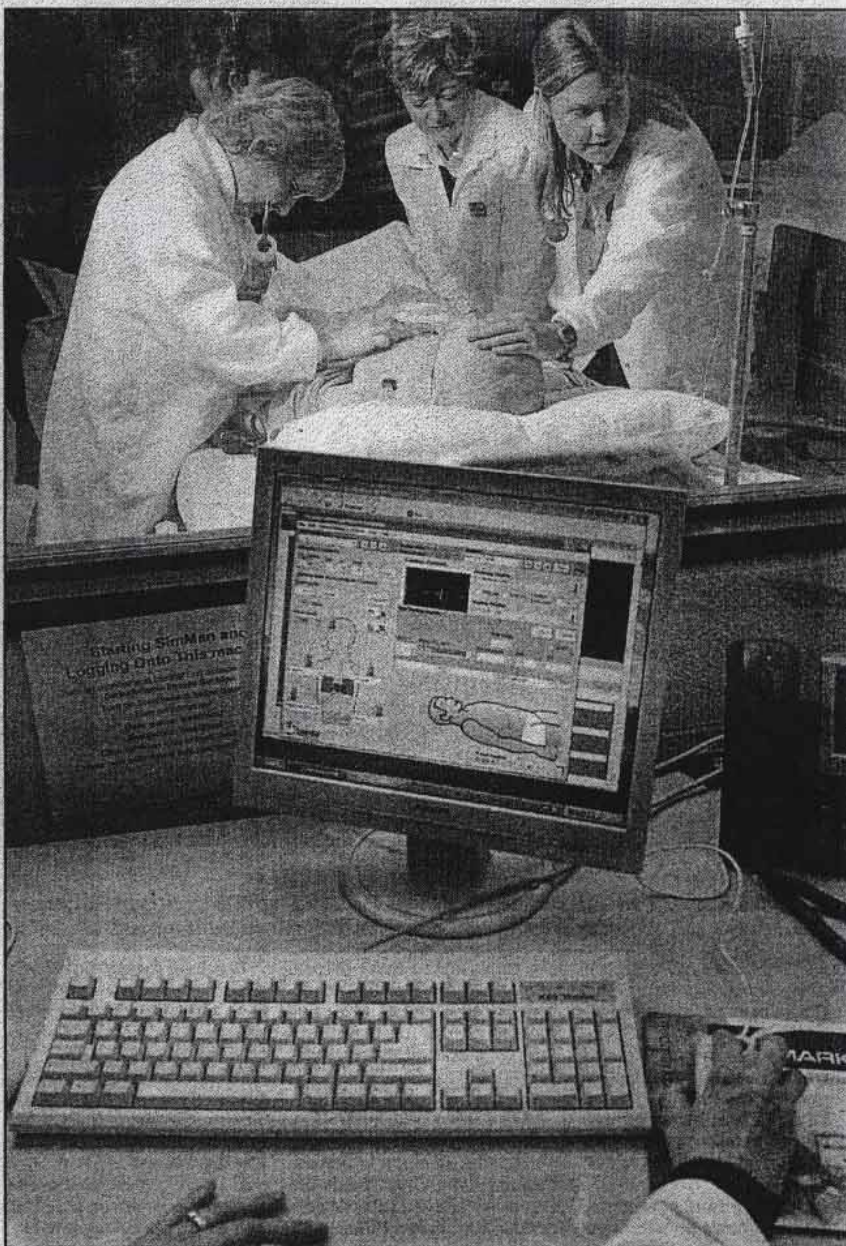
Cormier says the lab will allow the school to not only train more nurses, but also speed up the accreditation for nurses trained abroad.

Stephanie Constantineau hasn't worked in the field for 12 years, but is taking a refresher course at Algonquin College. She's tending to the wheezing old mannequin. Things have changed a lot since Constantineau first trained to be a nurse.

Students used to listen to each other's breathing when practising, she said, so the new lab is a welcome sight.

"Well, chances are everybody in there is healthy and you're not hearing any of those abnormal sounds that you are hearing in a hospital."

dave.pizer@ott.sunpub.com



Jason Ransom SUN

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE'S School of Health and Community Studies co-ordinator Ann Marie Mackey is flanked by students Cathy Brown, left, and Anne Brouse in the school's new Health Science Simulation Lab yesterday.