Background:
Digital Clinical Experiences (DCEs) are a unique way to meet the educational needs for an era of students that utilize technology in healthcare. Students are presented with scenarios from the perspective of a digital patient. DCEs immerse the student learner through the steps of data collection, advanced physical assessments, and diagnosis. In this study, the DCE technology was utilized by Advanced Health Assessment students in their second year of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. The Advanced Health Assessment course is a hybrid class taught over 16 weeks. Theory content is taught online with 6 face-to-face focused assessment practice sessions and additional practicum hours with an APRN or MD/DO.

Shadow Health Technology was utilized in this study and provided a life-like patient, “Tina Jones”. Students worked through 9 modules: HEENT, Cardiovascular, Respiratory, Abdominal, Neurological, Musculoskeletal, and Mental health.

DCEs were utilized to:
- Supplement online and clinical learning
- Improve the critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills
- Prepare the student for their role as Advanced Practice Nurses (APRNs).

Purpose:
To evaluate the effectiveness of Digital Clinical Experiences into the Advanced Health Assessment curriculum from the student perspective.

Methods:
A 10 question survey was constructed to:
- Evaluate the confidence level of the student on gathering subjective data, performing advanced physical assessments, and formulating a diagnosis
- Assess the impact on practicum performance
- Assess DCEs as a learning method

Surveys were sent to 38 students after they had completed the course. Response rate was 53% (n=20)

Results:
After participating in the DCE:
- 75% of respondents felt extremely or very confident in collecting a health history, 25% felt somewhat confident
- 80% felt extremely or very confident in effective patient communication, 20% felt somewhat confident
- 45% felt extremely or very confident in their advanced practice assessments, 55% felt somewhat confident
- Results suggest that students felt less confident in the areas of diagnosis and treatment.

Results suggest that overall, students found the DCE a positive addition to the curriculum.
- 90% of respondents felt that participating in the Advanced Health Assessment DCE was beneficial to their overall experience in the course.
- 85% of respondents felt the DCE improved their performance in the practicum with actual patients

“I liked that it was a controlled environment, where we could make mistakes and redo the simulation”

“It helped being able to see feedback at the end of each assignment so if changes needed to be made we were able to do so.”

Discussion:
As a learning method, DCEs provide:
- Controlled environment
- Ability to reflect and remediate
- Low-stakes physical assessment practice
- Increased confidence in performing advanced physical assessments
- Beneficial for eliciting subjective data and improving history taking techniques
- Cost effective (digital patient vs. simulated patient)
- Effective learning tool