Preparing students for the realities of contemporary nursing requires more than teaching communication models or human-factors theory. It demands learning experiences that reveal how individuals behave under pressure, ambiguity, and cognitive strain. This presentation showcases “Party Quirks”, an improvisation-based simulation that creates a controlled but deliberately chaotic environment in which students experience the emotional and behavioural challenges associated with real clinical practice.

Unlike high-fidelity clinical simulation, this activity uses social unpredictability as its realism. Students must navigate unclear communication, disruptive behaviours, conflicting cues, and rising frustration while working collaboratively to solve a shared problem. These features reflect well-documented contributors to human error in healthcare such as hierarchical inhibition, task fixation, reluctance to escalate concerns, and the cognitive overload described in patient safety literature (NHS Patient Safety Strategy, 2019; Reason, 2000). The design mirrors the uncertainty and mental load that nurses routinely encounter, from unexpected interruptions to ambiguous team communication.

Across multiple cohorts, “Party Quirks” has produced high engagement, rich reflective discussion, and immediate behavioural insight. Students consistently report recognising their own tendencies under pressure, including avoidance of help-seeking, overanalysis, communication breakdowns, and emotional reactions they had not anticipated. These reflections closely echo the human-factors themes explored in clinical incident analysis and safety training.

The structured debrief links students’ in-game behaviours to real-world scenarios, promoting discussion around psychological safety, speaking up, situational awareness, emotional intelligence, and team dynamics. The activity has also demonstrated inclusivity benefits, offering a low-stakes, culturally flexible space in which diverse learners contribute meaningfully to teamwork and communication tasks.

This session will present the design, theoretical rationale, implementation guidance, and observed outcomes of “Party Quirks”. It argues that low-resource, high-impact gamified simulations can meaningfully enhance the preparedness of nursing, midwifery, and allied health students by allowing them to feel and examine the human factors that shape safe clinical practice.