Learning Imitates Life at Sim Center
By Mike Journee

Landing a jet is something that you just cannot practice in real time. So for decades, the aviation industry and the military have trained pilots using simulators, giving inexperienced and experienced aviators a better feel for the hot seat without the dangers and consequences of on-the-job training in a real cockpit.

Seasoned health care professionals will tell you that caring for a patient whose life depends on precise, clear-eyed action, often amid turmoil and high emotion, requires the cool hand of a fighter pilot. One of the places the Treasure Valley’s health care community turns to give their professionals the assured skill sets they need is the College of Health Sciences’ Simulation Center at Boise State.

“It is far too risky to hone your skill set with the well-being of a patient hanging in the balance,” says Patricia Johnson, director of education for St. Luke’s Health System. “Boise State provides a safe environment for them to practice their craft so they ensure the best possible care experience for our patients.”

The Simulation Center provides Boise State nursing students with a state-of-the-art facility for incorporating skills, knowledge and decision-making into the context of taking care of a “real” patient. It’s a boon to local health care providers such as St. Luke’s, the Family Medicine Residency of Idaho and the Boise V.A. Medical Center as well, giving their professionals an opportunity to stay sharp.

The fully wired six-bed hospital suite features high-fidelity manikins that talk, have pulses, exhibit symptoms and give birth to baby manikins who do the same. With instructors and peers watching via screens in nearby debriefing rooms, participants focus on communication, collaboration, and crisis management to develop skills and teamwork behaviors that are best learned actively under realistic conditions.

“Assessing the cooperative patient, completing procedures and making decisions might seem easy in a quiet environment,” says Becky Bunderson, simulation specialist and coordinator for Boise State’s School of Nursing. “But add a dangerously ill or confused patient and an upset spouse and the situation can become difficult even for the experienced nurse. Our scenarios help students master many of the real situations they might face as practicing health care professionals.”

High-tech simulation manikins allow students to respond to a variety of patient situations in a controlled environment.