

Infusing Nursing Research into Practice for Quality Care

VR Selvaambigai*

Nursing practice based on research evidence has been shown to promote positive patient outcomes. Personal characteristics such as positive attitudes and involvement have been positively correlated with research utilisation. Organisational culture is a determinant of nurses' use of research in practice. Healthcare organisations must develop a supportive environment in an effort to attract nurses who share a similar philosophy to positively influence the organisation's research culture and ultimately the care patients receive. A primary mission of Nursing Excellence is to promote "best practices" among nurses.

What is Best Practice in Nursing?

Use of the phrase "*best practice in nursing*" has become increasingly popular over the last few years. At the same time, a clear and consistently used definition of what "best practice" really constitutes remains unavailable to many practicing nurses.

In many cases, the term "best practice" refers to nursing practices that are based on the "best evidence" available from nursing research. The goal of "best practices" is to apply the most recent, relevant, and helpful nursing interventions, based on research, in real-life practice. Although other terms for infusing day-to-day nursing practice with research-based interventions have been used in the past (e.g., research utilisation, research-based practice), the phrase "best practices in nursing" is the most popular today.

New knowledge based on nursing and related interdisciplinary research is rapidly expanding. Provision of high quality care depends on translating research-based knowledge into real-life nursing practice. Regrettably, methods used by many nurses in the past, such as attending conferences, networking with colleagues and reading professional journals can barely keep pace with the array of potentially valuable practice-related reports being released.

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

Evidence-based practice means basing clinical decisions on best possible evidence, especially high-quality research. Moving research findings into practice is important for the nursing profession. Barriers to the use of research findings in practice must be overcome. A dialogue between administration and staff about how to remove the barriers is critical.

* Tutor, College of Nursing, JIPMER, Puducherry.

Role of Nurse Educator

Nurse educators are crucial role models in the process of providing the foundation for research-based practice. Their ability to foster an appreciation for research instills this value in nursing students. The challenge for the nurse educator lies in making research an exciting and integral part of nursing education and eventually practice.

In this context, it is essential to: (i) Refer to research findings regularly in their lectures; (ii) Include research-based publications in their reference lists; (iii) Continually refer students to research articles; (iv) Motivate the students that research is an important foundation for practice. Research should not be limited to only a single course, but rather be a constant focus; (v) Ensure that clinical seminars include a discussion of research-based articles appropriate to that specific clinical rotation each week in the post-conferences; (vi) Encourage the students to seek the "newest" research findings in their field so they can possess the most current practice; (vii) Endeavour that the undergraduate students complete their programme with the ability to critique current research studies rather than writing a research proposal for a study they will not conduct; (viii) Foster the role of change agent in the nursing faculty.

Nursing students must see that *change can occur, but only if the need for change is identified*. Marquies & Huston (1996) cautioned that change should be implemented only for good reasons. Research-based clinical practices that solve problems, while making work procedures more efficient and therefore less costly, are good reasons for change. Since many programmes now at the master's level focus on nurse practitioner education, graduate students can benefit from participation in research utilisation projects. This will better equip them with the skills they will need to use after graduation.

Role of Nurse Researchers

Dissemination methods used by researchers in publications and presentations often inhibit rather than support research-based practice. The clinical nurse often finds the language foreign and the results difficult to interpret and apply to the patient. For patients to benefit from research-based practice, researchers must make a concerted effort to include information that specifically addresses practical clinical applications of their findings.

It may be noted that: (i) Rapid dissemination of research results is important; (ii) Presenting findings at

regional and national meetings will help accomplish this goal; (iii) Disseminating the information in the literature is critical although the time involved in developing a manuscript and moving it through the publication process is lengthy one; (iv) The research community also needs to lay emphasis on replicating studies to strengthen the foundation for research-based practice. This is the time to revisit the philosophy related to publishing research studies for dissemination.

Kirkevold (1997) states that research reports tend to be written with other nurse scholars as the target audience, rather than clinicians. Study results must be a link to practice. This could occur in publications through a clearly delineated section related to practice implications or a sidebar with a focus on clinical applications. Clearer and more useful reports can help overcome the barriers to research-based practice.

Role of Administrators

The organisation should look forward to results from research-based practice. The culture of research should be encouraged in the organisation. The nurses should continually promote questioning current practices. Stonestreet & Lamb-Havard (1994) refer to this as *"you get what you ask for."* The attention to the development of research-based policies should not be influenced only by the requirements of JCAHO, but the desire of the interdisciplinary team to offer clients the most effective treatments. The structure of the health care organisation should support research-based practice.

1. Establishing a department of nursing research immediately indicates the institution's level of commitment to research.
2. Nurses should also hold positions on internal review boards.
3. Collaborative research projects should be encouraged so that each discipline's perspective can be considered when developing a plan of care.
4. Job descriptions should address this important aspect in the duties of the health care team members.
5. Nurses should be encouraged to update their research skills.
6. Nurses can seek advanced nursing degrees, or the organisation can work with the local schools of nursing to provide educational updates regarding research utilisation.
7. Institutions can send nurses in key positions to conferences which provide practice updates, or bring in researchers to share their findings with nurses, as well as other members of the interdisciplinary team. This could increase acceptance by physicians and other health care providers of nursing research findings.
8. Journals that focus on research-based practices

should be accessible to nurses who work in clinical areas through libraries.

9. Nurses can be encouraged to publish their findings in professional journals.

If hospitals and other health care organisations expect nurses to stay current, they need to provide the necessary resources for them to do so. The more opportunity the nurse has to read research articles, the greater the chance that research findings will be adopted (Brett, 1987). There are ways to make important findings accessible (Lekander, Tracy & Lindquist, 1994). Many clinical journals are now emphasising research-based practice. New formats include brief abstracts focusing on clinical applications rather than research method. Promotion of teleconferences is another effective way of sharing research findings.

Today's nurses must provide care that is based on the best available evidence. Creating a programme that supports routine use of evidence-based practice can seem complicated and time-consuming. A successful programme includes built-in organisational support for clinical inquiry, functional and efficient processes for EBP activities, to sustain momentum and interest over time. Strategies for making EBP part of everyday care need to be identified, along with suggestions for overcoming barriers to change and ideas for acknowledging nurses for EBP work.

Implementing & Evaluating the Innovation Pilot Test

1. Improving the utilisation of research findings
2. Developing an evaluation plan
3. Collecting information on outcomes
4. Training staff in the use of the new guideline and, if necessary, "market" the innovation
5. Developing guidelines on one or more units or with a group of clients
6. Evaluating the pilot project for its wider suitability

Role of Nurses : Nurses should : (i) Read widely and critically; (ii) Attend professional conferences; (iii) Learn to expect evidence that a procedure is effective; (iv) Become involved in a journal club; (v) Pursue and participate in RU/EBP projects.

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