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Research Questions from Nursing Practice

Author

Julie Benbenishty RN BA

ICU, Hadassah Medical Organization

Jerusalem, Israel

Correspondence

Julie@hadassah.org.il

Nursing research can improve patient care and outcome, promote professional growth and help avoid staff burnout. In this article, Julie Benbenishty describes the steps from asking a research question to completing research. Also in this issue of **ICU Management** (page 34), you can read an article co-authored by Julie Benbenishty, Maureen BenNun and colleagues, describing a research project, which was awarded the 2003 Professor Bergman prize for Creativity in Nursing by Tel Aviv University.

Research provides the opportunity to further knowledge, to gain recognition in setting standards for patient care and nursing practice, and to grow personally and professionally. By participating in research projects, nurses improve nursing practice and patient care and become leaders in their own departments. Nurses can lead the entire research process from developing a research question through to data collection and analysis, and the publication process. Once published, nurses have the opportunity to present their findings at national and international meetings, thereby influencing patient care and nursing practice at a global level. Completing research can also improve the quality of life for the working team. With the promotion of nursing research, the burnout rate is greatly reduced and nursing staff tend to stay in the unit (Burt 1999).

Approaching Nursing Research

The main requirements for nursing researchers are an enquiring mind and interest in looking for ways to improve patient care. Nurses, above all other healthcare providers, have the best opportunity to identify problems and patterns of patient behaviours and to observe patient responses to therapy. Although there is much professional literature to support provision of patient care, too often there are gaps in the literature for the specific problems that nurses are dealing with, and for which better procedures are required. (The article opposite in this issue of **ICU Management** describes how to appraise evidence from the literature.)

Recognized patterns and problems allows us to ask questions about how care can be improved. Nurses, regardless of academic background, must be able to identify what needs to be changed and what we don't know about the patterns observed with patients. This is the first step towards developing a research question.

The next step is to understand the resources available to explore the research question and help find the answers. Nurses approaching research need to believe that what they have to say is important and to identify the key contacts to progress their ideas. They need to invite collaborators who are also interested in the topic or issue, and who have been actively involved in developing research, and have the academic credentials to develop a study. The prospect of developing research may be frightening for nurses who are not familiar with the process. However, the best research is most often a group effort; research cannot be achieved alone. The ICU nurse who is motivated to perform research must involve his or her nursing team and other staff members sharing the same goal. Table 1 lists all the steps as a checklist for nurses to progress towards completing research.

Nursing research investigates topics that relate directly or indirectly to nursing, affect nursing practice and influence the lives of patients and practitioners. Nursing research can be descriptive, quasi-experimental or experimental. It can be conducted through quantitative or qualitative methodologies and may be retrospective, prospective or longitudinal in design. Research findings determine how nurses deliver care, educate each other, and manage their practice. With evidence-based nursing practice, patients are more likely to receive nursing care that is safe and effective, promotes comfort and the best outcomes.

In Nightingale's view, nursing should be a search for truth. She believed that the ability to collect accurate information and make correct observations was essential. "If you cannot get the habit of observation one way or other, you had better give up being a nurse, for it is not your calling, however kind and anxious you might be" (Nightingale 1969). Nursing research gathers evidence for good practice to improve healthcare and can also promote team spirit and professional development.

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