

Evidence-Based Practice

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Abstract

Evidence-based practice is an important approach to provide the best quality care to patients and their families. When defining evidence-based practice in nursing, it is important to distinguish between research utilization, evidence-based practice and research conduct. Research utilization is defined as “the use of research knowledge, often based on a single study in clinical practice.” Although the term “research utilization” often is used interchangeably with evidence-based practice, research utilization is but a part of evidence-based practice.

Keywords: Evidence based practice; Research utilization.

Introduction

- During the 1980s, the term “evidence-based medicine” emerged to describe the approach that used scientific evidence to determine the best practice[1].
- Later, the term shifted to become “evidence-based practice” as clinicians other than physicians recognized the importance of scientific evidence in clinical decision-making.[1]
- Various definitions of evidence-based practice (EBP) have emerged in the literature, but the most commonly used definition is, “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of the current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients”.[1]
- Subsequently, experts began to talk about evidence-based healthcare as a process by which research evidence is used in making decisions about a specific population or group of patients.[1]

- Evidence-based practice and evidence-based healthcare assume that evidence is used in the context of a particular patient’s preferences and desires, the clinical situation, and the expertise of the clinician. They also expect that healthcare professionals can read, critique, and synthesize research findings and interpret existing evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.[1]

Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing

Nurses ask numerous questions when looking to integrate evidence-based practice into their clinical environment:

- What exactly is EBP?
- Is EBP the same as nursing research?
- What is the difference between EBP and quality improvement?
- Is EBP relevant to nursing practice?

The answer to these questions is discussed below.[2]

Definitions of Research Utilization, Quality Improvement, and Nursing Research

Evidence-based practice is not research utilization, quality improvement, or nursing research, although it

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may be related to each of these processes. For example, quality improvement projects may be evidence-based, and the findings may contribute to other EBP or research initiatives. Also, an evidence-based practice project can lead to a research study or quality improvement initiative.[2]

Research Utilization

For decades, nurses have used available research to guide nursing practice and their efforts to improve patient outcomes. This process involved critical analysis and evaluation of research findings and then determining how they fit into clinical practice. Incorporating pertinent research findings into clinical practice (and evaluating the changes' effectiveness), helps close the gap between research and practice.[1]

Quality or Performance Improvement

Quality, clinical, or performance improvement focuses on systems, processes, and functional, clinical, satisfaction, and cost outcomes. Typically, quality improvement efforts are not designed to develop nursing practice standards or nursing science, but they may contribute to understand best practices or the processes of care in which nurses are actively involved[2].

Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing: A Guide to Successful Implementation

A commonly accepted view is that quality improvement activities in healthcare are not intended to generate scientific knowledge but rather to serve as management tools to improve the processes and outcomes within a specific healthcare organization or setting. More recently, experts have focused on improving care by examining and working within clinical Microsystems or the specific places where patients, families, and care teams meet.

Quality improvement initiatives generally address clinical problems or issues, examine clinical processes, and use specific indicators to help evaluate clinical performance. Data are collected and analyzed to help understand both the process and the related outcomes. The findings help contribute to efforts to achieve and maintain continuous improvement through ongoing monitoring and improvement activities.

For example, a hospital might be interested in improving its smoking cessation education for hospitalized patients, so it may convene a multidisciplinary team to address the issue. The team may decide to measure the hospital's performance using the percentage of discharge summaries that indicate that a smoker received instruction about smoking cessation. The team might implement an educational program and an electronic discharge summary that prompts clinicians to indicate whether the patient is a smoker and, if so, whether he or she received smoking cessation advice. They would monitor the rate of compliance and modify the interventions until compliance with the requirement to provide smoking cessation advice is greater than 95%. [1]

Nursing Research and Evidence- Based Practice

Nursing research involves systematic inquiry specifically designed to develop, refine, and extend nursing knowledge. As part of a clinical and professional discipline, nurses have a unique body of knowledge that addresses nursing practice, administration, and education. Nurse researchers examine problems of specific concern to nurses and the patients, families, and communities they serve. Nursing research methods may be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed (i.e., triangulated):

- In quantitative studies researchers use objective, quantifiable data (such as blood pressure or pulse rate) or use a survey instrument to measure knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences.[3]
- Qualitative researchers use methods such as interviews or narrative analyses to help understand a particular phenomenon.[3]
- Triangulated approaches use both quantitative and qualitative methods.[3]

Regardless of the method they use, researchers must adhere to certain approaches to ensure both the quality and the accuracy of the data and related analyses. The intent of each approach is to answer questions and develop knowledge using the scientific method.

In spite of the method used in nursing research nurses must understand that EBP is the conscientious use of current best evidence in making clinical

decisions about patient care, it is clinical problem solving strategy that de-emphasizes decision-making based on custom and emphasizes the integration of research evidence with clinical expertise and patient preferences. Evidence based clinical practice guidelines combine a synthesis of research evidence with specific recommendations for clinical decision making.[4]

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