

## FACILITER LA RECHERCHE EN SOINS INFIRMIERS : UN MANDAT PROFESSIONNEL POUR LES INFIRMIERES ET INFIRMIERS PERIOPERATOIRES

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### RESUME :

Les soins de la santé et les technologies qui y sont associées deviennent de plus en plus complexes et le domaine s'étend à un rythme alarmant. Afin de prospérer dans ce milieu, le domaine des soins infirmiers doit faire beaucoup plus que ne pas tomber derrière, il doit jouer un rôle directeur dans l'avenir des soins de la santé. Les infirmières et les infirmiers sont constamment demandés d'élargir leurs zones de confort en développant de nouvelles approches et de nouvelles techniques innovatrices qui font une différence pour la santé des patients et pour la communauté en général. Face à ce défi, il faut poser cette question : Comment est-ce que nous, en tant qu'infirmières et infirmiers périopératoires, pouvons demeurer compétent au niveau technique, démontrer une capacité de jugement et de prise de décision indépendante et qualifiée tout en gardant à jour nos connaissances et notre pratique? La réponse, c'est la recherche.

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## FACILITATING NURSING RESEARCH: A PROFESSIONAL MANDATE FOR PERIOPERATIVE NURSES

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Health care and health care technology are becoming increasingly complex and expanding at an unprecedented pace. To thrive within this milieu, nursing as a profession must not only keep up with the pace but also set the pace for the future of health care. Nurses are constantly challenged to expand their 'comfort zone' by presenting creative approaches to health care, and developing new and innovative interventions that make a difference to the health status of patients and the community as a whole. As a consequence of this challenge, the question is raised: How do we as perioperative nurses expect to be competent technically, demonstrate independent judgement and skilled decision-making, and keep our knowledge base and practice current? The answer is through research.

The ultimate importance of research is found in its definition. Research generates knowledge. Nursing research provides a specialised scientific base that empowers the profession to anticipate and meet these constantly shifting challenges, and maintain our societal relevance. This in turn allows us to make better-informed decisions and validates existing practices built through tradition, intuition and personal experience. Research can examine tried and true practices and make them more efficient, less expensive, less complicated<sup>1</sup> or debunk them!

The introduction of evidence-based practice in Australia is perhaps the most powerful influence in promoting the utilisation of research in clinical practice and impacting on how nurses think about and use research. Evidence-based nursing is clinical activity that is based on the premise that the best available current scientific evidence should inform decisions about the delivery of care to patients. This means nurses adopt effective practices by questioning whether there is a scientific basis for the care that they



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deliver, in order to provide quality care for their patients and their families. However, to provide evidence-based practice nurses must participate in research including reading, understanding and applying the available research literature to promote positive patient outcomes<sup>1</sup>. In essence, we need to be scholars who know and use research principles in clinical practice<sup>2</sup>

### SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH TO PERIOPERATIVE NURSING

Toda, more than ever before, perioperative nurses are required to be accountable for the quality of the patient care they deliver. In an era of consumerism where the quality of health care and high health care costs are questioned, consumers, health care employers and governments are asking health professionals to document the effectiveness of their care. What they seek is the justification of our practises by asking, "How does this care make a difference?" This is the case in perioperative nursing, where technicians are threatening to erode our role. The message can hardly be clearer; how consumers and employers perceive the value of nurses' contributions will determine the profession's role in any future health care delivery system. Health care agencies in both the public and private sectors require accountability for services provided.

To ensure the survival and continued growth of the perioperative nursing specialty, research and research utilisation are essential; indeed, it is a professional mandate for all perioperative nurses. This professional mandate is directed towards understanding the care of individuals and groups, and the biological, behavioural and environmental influences on health, and ensuring these inform nursing practice. Through research perioperative nurses develop knowledge about health and health promotion related to the care of those with health problems, disabilities or dysfunctions, and interventions that can help individuals to respond effectively to actual or potential health problems<sup>3,4</sup>. Moreover, research utilisation should increase the quality and efficiency of patient care, as well as result in personal and professional growth for nurses.

Research is required for perioperative nursing to maintain its identity as a discipline founded on professional practice and whose philosophical underpinnings encompass a systematic, research-based body of scientific knowledge<sup>4, 5</sup>. To make certain that this goal is sustained a perioperative nurse must be a knowledgeable research consumer, one who can critique research and use existing standards to determine the merit and utility of research for clinical practice. Therefore, skills of critical thinking and reasoning are necessary. According to Anne Thomson<sup>6</sup> (p.2), "Critical thinking and reasoning is (sic) centrally concerned with analysing and evaluating one's own and other people's reasoning, as well as devising and constructing better reasoning. Common to these activities are certain distinct skills, for example, recognising reasons and conclusions, recognising unstated assumptions, drawing conclusions, appraising evidence, evaluating statements, and judging whether conclusions are warranted". The importance of critical thinking and reasoning skills for perioperative nurses are reflected further when they work together with other health care professionals to conduct and utilise relevant research, and collaborate on efforts that improve patient care through evidence-based practice<sup>4,5,7</sup>.

The operating suite milieu continues to become more technologically challenging and one in which perioperative nurses must combine the use of new technology with knowledgeable and safe care, so patients do not experience complications. Within this environment there is increasing pressure from patients and their relatives to expect nurses to incorporate research findings into their every day practice. The International Council of Nursing requires that nursing practice be evidenced based<sup>8</sup>, supporting this premise. In many countries around the world, including Australia, rapid changes in the discipline and practice of nursing have resulted in changes to skills and job requirements. In the past 10 years, Australian nurses have become increasingly aware of the need for high quality research promoting the body of knowledge and skills within their

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profession<sup>4</sup>. However, attempts to promote research participation and utilisation by nurses have had mixed success.

In Australia, there are some nurse clinicians who still require convincing about the relevance of conducting research or using research findings to inform practice<sup>9</sup>. At times I, too, have found this when I have been invited to speak to clinical nurses regarding research and its importance to their professional development. On commencing these sessions the first thing I do is to pose a series of questions, such as: What image comes to mind when you think of the word 'research'? Is research important to nursing? Who should do or use research? In response, there are those who have a basic understanding of what research is but are unsure how it can become part of the day-to-day practice of nursing. Some think only intellectual types are attracted to research. Some never thought of research as part of their responsibilities. Others worry about understanding and making sense of it all. Most agree that research has a place in nursing, but think someone else should be doing or using it and that their time could be better spent on other pursuits. Then there are others who are excited and curious about research but somewhat anxious about getting started. These diverse reactions have been compounded further by the reported barriers to the active utilisation and participation of nurses in research<sup>1</sup>.

### BARRIERS TO RESEARCH UTILISATION AND PARTICIPATION

There are many barriers to the use and practise of research in nursing. These barriers include: resistance to change, heavy workloads giving neither the time nor energy to do research-related activities, insufficient resources to implement changes to practice, lack of supportive infrastructure, lack of research skills including an inability to critique research articles, lack of professional autonomy to effect change, and inability to access and engage with research findings<sup>1,10,11,12,13</sup>. These factors are also reported within the perioperative nursing arena, and are compounded by administrative requirements to improve efficiency and decrease long waiting lists, which pressure the surgical

team to treat more patients. Acute procedures and lack of personal resources increase nurses' workload and inhibit the time for research involvement<sup>14</sup>. However, there are published reports indicating that perioperative nurses do have time to read research reports at work, but they place higher priority on other activities such as cleaning the theatre, decontaminating instruments, and reading non-scientific journals<sup>14,15,16</sup>. It is further suggested that 'lack of time' can be an excuse for lack of interest or competence to assess research reports. Other studies have shown that most perioperative nurses are women who have off-duty priorities such as families, and who do not want or do not have spare time to read nursing literature<sup>7,15,16</sup>. This lack of desire to become involved in research has also been reported amongst clinicians in other settings within Australia<sup>4</sup>.

A recent study conducted by Hommelstad and Ruland<sup>14</sup>, examined 159 perioperative nurses' perceptions of barriers and facilitators to the use of research findings in nursing practice. The findings, which were consistent with those reported by previous researchers<sup>10,11,12,13,14,17</sup>, indicated that the major barriers included:

- insufficient time for research activities, such as reading research articles and implementing research findings into practice,
- lack of authority and autonomy to administer their time at work to allow them to initiate research,
- difficulties in locating research literature and findings about perioperative nursing,
- lack of understanding of statistical analyses, and lack of competence and confidence in the research process to critically evaluate research findings,
- lack of interest and personal resources.

Although there are recognised barriers, which impede the utilisation by, and participation of, nurses in research, there are many perioperative nurses who exhibit positive attitudes towards research. The latter recognise the need to analyse research data and use research findings to fulfil their role as competent perioperative nurses<sup>14</sup>. In order to promote research utilisation and participation amongst

perioperative nurses and develop positive attitudes, strategies need to be established. In so doing, this will reduce the barriers perceived to hinder involvement and, form assistance and support in facilitating utilisation and participation<sup>5,7,18,19,20,21</sup>.

### STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE RESEARCH UTILISATION AND PARTICIPATION

The utilisation and participation in research to improve practice is a shared responsibility. That is, to play a role in promoting research-based care, commitment and collaboration is required of perioperative nurses at all levels, including clinicians, educators, administrators, and researchers. Strategies therefore need to be created that encourage nurses to participate in research activities to enable them to develop a familiarity with the process, which will hopefully lead to more research utilisation. Such strategies would range along a continuum from informal sharing of research information with colleagues to formal models of planned research and could include but not be limited to the following.

### SUPPORT

Finding a support infrastructure is necessary to sustain research and for those who are carrying out a project. As lack of time has been identified to be the major barrier, support through providing time for research activities is essential. In most cases perioperative nurses have no authority to administer their time at work, and the possibility of finding time for research activities in practice depends on nurse administrators. Roberts and Taylor<sup>22</sup> suggest nursing administration at the institutional level could offer research scholarships for a staff member to work with a researcher within the hospital for one day a week. Administrators could also organise for perioperative nurses to have time on-duty to take part in and implement research activities.

Nurse administrators should set institutional goals that include the use of research findings to promote excellence in practice. Management can support the efforts of perioperative nurses to work to accomplish such goals by rewarding research utilisation efforts in tangible ways,

such as incorporating research activity and utilisation into promotion criteria, extra days off, financial stipends, employment honour rolls, and celebrations to recognise staff efforts<sup>22</sup>. These incentives would assist in removing some of the barriers.

### EDUCATION

It is expected that nurses base their practice on evidence, that is, on research findings. However, before it is possible to utilise and implement research findings, nurses must learn to read and critique research. Nurse administrators could assist to promote research literacy by encouraging perioperative nurses to:

- read research, for example by suggesting they take out subscriptions to relevant journals, such as ACORN, or promoting staff to go to the library during less busy periods in the operating suite,
- attend education programs that would provide guidance for those who lack the competence to critically evaluate research findings or to search online bibliographic databases,
- attend conferences where research is presented,
- present research results at operating suite in-service sessions, and
- provide study leave, which would give staff an opportunity to read literature and search databases at work<sup>1,14,23</sup>.

The possible negative consequences of these strategies are increased workload and pressure on the other perioperative nurses, which will need addressing. By giving perioperative nurses study leave however, nurse administrators express the value and importance of research activities in nursing practice<sup>14</sup>.

Staff development nurses also have a significant part to play by role-modelling utilisation of research in their unit-based teaching of perioperative nursing and processes. Staff development nurses, nurse educators and clinical nurse educators could post weekly research articles on an information board to encourage staff to synthesise research in an area of interest and, for example, develop a protocol

## FACILITATING NURSING RESEARCH (cont.)

for implementation into practice. They should engage staff in reflective practice and critical appraisal of the research literature by providing research information to staff and discussing its relevance to perioperative nursing practice. This could occur via a journal club, or through the periodic use of regular in-service time.

### RESEARCH LITERATURE ACCESSIBILITY

Research literature should be available in the operating suite to facilitate research use. For easy access to information the computer revolution is in full bloom and has spawned the Internet. The 'information highway' can instantly link us to people and resources around the world and we can tap into the latest information available about almost any subject imaginable<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, having a computer available within the operating suite on which nurses could access scientific journals is important, to promote awareness of research findings, and subscriptions to online journals can improve availability.

### RESEARCH PERIOPERATIVE NURSING CONSULTANTS

Setting up research nursing consultants through joint appointments between hospitals and universities is part of collaborative practice occurring today. The appointment of a research perioperative nursing consultant would be closely related to other clinical nurse-researchers in the operating suite and the institution. Such appointees have the potential to provide powerful role models to increase the utilisation of research in perioperative nursing. According to Roberts and Taylor<sup>23</sup>, "... the actual presence of the researcher in the clinical area and resultant dialogue with clinicians is a key factor for making nursing research relevant. These individuals have the responsibility for conducting clinical research that is relevant to the area and for promoting research utilisation as a part of improving practice. They can also give seminars, in-service programs and workshops. They can involve the clinicians at every stage of the research projects and the clinicians can feel some ownership of the findings" (p. 519).

Learning about and participating in research is an excellent way to socialise perioperative nurses to the contemporary nurse scholar role and to improve nurses' clinical decision-making. It can be used by all perioperative nurses at all educational levels and at all stages in their careers to do their jobs more effectively. This means that one can use research right now to improve the care given to patients in the clinical setting<sup>1</sup>.

If you believe nursing research is important to your professional practice but for various reasons are having trouble getting started, you are not alone. Remember the experienced researcher will always emphasise that clinical settings are the best place to generate research questions; therefore as a clinician, your contribution is essential. Advice to novice researchers or those interested in getting started<sup>1,24</sup> include the following:

- Develop personal characteristics (for example, discipline and intellectual curiosity) that enhance your research skills.
- Keep a log of ideas for potential studies.
- Develop or maintain ties with library resources.
- Assess your clinical area and identify a topic or area of research that you love (for example, a specific patient population, or a particular theory, such as stress theory).
- Get experience as a research assistant.
- Think small, that is narrow your ideas so that you do not try to do too much in one study.
- Network with other perioperative nurses who work in other settings and get them involved.
- Develop collegial relationships with other nurses or members of the health team, who are conducting research in the perioperative field.
- Find a mentor.
- Conduct research that is meaningful, that is it has meaning for patients and for their carers/providers

We can conduct meaningful research that describes patient or nursing outcomes, such as the studies reported in the ACORN Journal on promoting family centred care in the post anaesthetic care unit<sup>26</sup> and the traumatic experiences of perioperative nurses<sup>27, 28,29</sup>. We

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can be good research consumers by reading research articles and reviews, and applying findings in our practice settings. Research collaboration is also possible between perioperative nurses, nurse researchers, other health care researchers and researchers from other disciplines. It may take time, energy, opportunities and organisational skills before projects get under way, but the rewards can be many for nursing and for the other people with whom nurses collaborate<sup>23</sup>.

The utilisation and participation in research by perioperative nurses should be an integral part of their role to improve outcomes for their patients and themselves through the knowledge of best practice in health<sup>4,5,6</sup>. This is supported by the ACORN Standards for Perioperative Nursing, Position Statement (PS) 3 Nursing Research (2004). It is acknowledged that not all of us are capable of conducting quantitative or qualitative studies, but we can facilitate such research by being data collectors or participating in some other way, and/or by being consumers of research. If we want to preserve our professional status and guard against encroachment of our practice by other occupational groups, we need more clinical research. If you have not embraced the importance of nursing research, what will be the deciding factor for you to do so?

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