

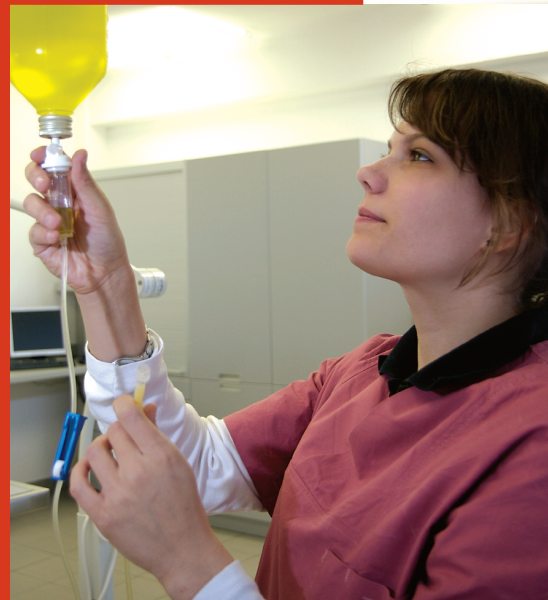


# Nursing Research

## PROGRAM BUILDER



Strategies to  
Translate Findings  
into Practice



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# Why Nursing Research is Important

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the participant should be able to:

- Discuss the history of nursing research
- Discuss the current view of nursing research
- Identify the benefits of nursing research

## Research, Ugh!

Everyone knows research is a good thing, but many nurses feel it's beyond them. Many nurses who provide direct care to patients frown at the thought of conducting research, and one reason is often their past experience with research when they were in school. Nurses who are enrolled in a nursing research course often feel as if they are taking a foreign language class, both because nursing research has its own unique terminology and because they feel they will never use it again. Too often in these classes, nurses want only to earn a passing grade and move on. They are given research articles to read that have no direct relationship to the type of care they are involved in. Their lack of interest and the pressure to pass the course sometimes discourages nurses from participating in research.

Another reason nurses often do not want to participate in research is their lack of knowledge in how to get it done and because they do not want to ask for help and are not sure who to ask if they did. This is why organizational support is strongly needed to ensure nurses have the training they need and mentors to support them. Nurses need to realize research is not “just one more thing that

must get done” as mandated by their organization, but that it is a way to empower nurses in their professional careers and to make needed changes in the delivery of nursing care that will positively affect patient outcomes.

Some nurses (and we all know some who fit into this category) simply do not want to learn anything new and want to continue the status quo. Nurses like this should probably try a new profession. How can nurses be responsible for one of the most precious items on earth (human lives) and not want to be the best? We often ask patients to change their lifestyles to benefit their health, why not ask nurses to change their perception of research to benefit themselves and their patients? When a positive learning environment is encouraged and support is given by peers, managers, and the organization, habits of ethical scholarship can take place.

### **History of Nursing and Nursing Research**

Nursing is a highly respected profession, and its origins can be traced back to ancient civilizations. What we accept today as the science of nursing was first promoted by Florence Nightingale, who recognized the need for formalized training of nurses. She also strongly advocated for sanitation reforms based on her observations during the Crimean War, where she nursed soldiers from 1854–1856.

Nightingale had a vivid interest in people and in social statistics regarding infection control, which brought her international recognition and respect. Although many consider research conducted by nurses to be a skill that was adopted much later, it can actually be traced back to this nursing leader, who influenced the science of nursing based on her observations, statistical studies, and other interventions she developed.

The importance of nursing research cannot be underestimated, and the effect of research on the profession has greatly influenced the way nursing has progressed through the years. Looking at the contributions nurses have made to the development of nursing shows how these leaders founded some of our most basic research principles. For example, Clara Barton spent four years after the Civil War locating missing soldiers, and she used research skills to do so. Later, she became a nationally recognized nursing leader and organized the American Red Cross, where she continued to work until shortly before her death.

Another great nursing leader was Mary Breckenridge, who in 1923 provided much-needed nursing care to rural Kentuckians. Breckenridge often rode a horse to visit her patients and, therefore, lacked the ability to carry many supplies. She had to be creative in her nursing interventions, which were based on an early form of observational research, noting the interventions that had previously helped others in similar situations.

The *American Journal of Nursing*, first published in 1900, featured nursing case studies and was the first step toward publishing research for nursing peers in a journal format. By 1952, *Nursing Research* was launched, which focused solely on nursing's endeavors in research.

In the 1950s, the American Medical Association requested an increase in the numbers of nurses so they could assist physicians with the care of their patients. The need for nurses to assist physicians ultimately led to the development of physician assistants and nurse practitioners, and with this development of extended roles for nursing and greater knowledge levels, the need for nursing research grew.

By the 1980s, nursing research had become so widespread that funding for it became a priority. In 1989, the development of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)—formerly known as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research—helped establish clinical guidelines based on nursing research findings that are still active today.

These examples represent just a few of the most prominent accounts of how nurses in the past used scientific inquiry to enhance the lives of their patients and promote the knowledge base of nursing.

### Current View of Nursing Research

Nursing research is the systematic approach to solving and understanding clinical problems, as well as determining the effectiveness of current nursing interventions. Current nursing practice is focused on enriching evidence for quality care. Thus if nursing research is so valuable, why do nurses shy away from conducting or participating in it?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that many nurses don't understand how to apply research into clinical practice.



### ***Who currently conducts research?***

Current nursing research is practiced primarily by nurse researchers hired by hospitals and educational facilities. Organizations hire nurse researchers to be leaders in conducting research. They often help identify what research is needed, based on needs analysis, and help other staff members to identify important research needs. They also guide nurses through writing proposals and making presentations to investigational review boards, and then help communicate subsequent research findings to all departments and areas that might benefit.

Nurse researchers often work alone, but they also can play important collaborative and educational roles in an organization, including mentoring staff nurses, promoting collegiality with other hospitals and community resources, consulting at research reviews, providing scholarly dialogue and communication, and working toward obtaining funding to support their research activities (and therefore also their salaries).

### ***Nursing research and evidence-based practice***

Nurse researchers can build excitement among staff nurses and all interdisciplinary team members by fostering nurses' interest and participation in evidence-based practice (EBP).

The purpose of conducting nursing research is to provide EBP for the discipline of nursing. EBP states that nursing practice should not be based solely on traditions or personal experience, but should be based on scientific research findings.

Titler (2006) defines EBP as “The conscientious and judicious use of current best evidence to guide healthcare decisions for improving patient outcomes.” This means that nurses and other healthcare providers should make thoughtful decisions about what is best for their patients based on what is currently known about the phenomenon.

It is important to remember that EBP and nursing research are not one and the same. EBP is guided by and based on research. EBP can also be based on evidence-based education, professional wisdom, empirical evidence and information, individual experience, consensus, and scientifically-based research.

When nurses want to focus on making their practice evidence-based, they should quickly review what is currently being practiced and determine whether changes are needed. If problems exist with the current practice or if you want to know whether your current practice is up to date, start with

reviewing the literature. Literature reviews can be accomplished with the help of a medical librarian or search engines. Meta-analysis—which is a compilation of multiple research studies performed on the same concept with similar findings listed—is another quick way to review current research on the proposed change.

Other strategies for determining what is currently known about the proposed practice include attending journal clubs and talking to experts in the field, performing systematic reviews, and reading EBP guidelines established by professional organizations. Nurses can also attend hospital standards of care committee meetings that focus on policy and practice changes based on the strongest current EBP. Once an understanding of current practice is determined, it can then be decided if research should be conducted. This type of review process will also be helpful later when deciding on the actual research design.

### Benefits of Nursing Research

During the past 30 years, a revolution in healthcare delivery and nursing services has occurred. The need for nurses to work with various populations has expanded the range of nursing roles. Nurses are employed in many different settings and function as interdisciplinary “team members” based on research, practice, and education (Joel, 2002).

Nurses work with multiple populations in the healthcare environment. Humans are complex and present many potential problems, which provides a rich environment for nursing research. How many times have nurses wondered, “What if we did it this way?” or “I wonder what would happen if . . . ?” These questions are the impetus for nursing research.

Nurses can take these questions and find out the answers for themselves. They can review current EBP, appraise the evidence critically, and decide whether and what type of research may be needed for the particular circumstance in question. It is this process of natural inquiry that is the basis of EBP and the beginning of the research process.

Nursing research plays an important role in the field of nursing. It promotes lifelong professional development of the discipline of nursing and supports the fact that nursing is a professional discipline. Nursing research improves clinical expertise and personal knowledge, helps to implement changes to provide excellence in nursing care, and helps to locate additional resources.

### Research Benefits

Research promotes increased autonomy for nurses. Why wait for others to answer our questions? We can answer them ourselves.

Nursing research also reduces the specters of “sacred cows” and “the good ol’ boys sitting around the table” who make decisions that are not based on scientific fact. It changes tradition to promote the art and science of nursing practice. The future advancement of nursing as a profession must include nursing research, and nurses must continue to conduct research and use EBP as a basis for providing quality care and promoting excellence in nursing science.

This book will assist nurses at all levels to conduct and apply clinical research in their everyday practice and ensure a continual focus on optimum patient care.



### Practice Exercises

1. Perform an Internet search and look for contributions to the history of nursing by nurses from your home state.
2. During the next week, begin writing down clinical questions you have encountered in practice that may precipitate a need for nursing research.

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