

Leveling Evidence-based Practice Across the Nursing Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Evidence-based practice (EBP) competencies represent essential components of nursing education at all levels. The transition of EBP learning goals from the baccalaureate to the master of science in nursing and doctor of nursing practice levels provides a blueprint for the development and advancement of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The purpose of this article is to describe 3 nursing curricula related to EBP competencies at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctor of nursing practice levels.

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The translation of knowledge into practice leads to improved patient outcomes. However, evidence-based practice (EBP) competencies vary among nurses.¹ Developing EBP competencies according to the level of nursing education remains a challenge and warrants further exploration. Ensuring a seamless transition of EBP competencies across all levels of nursing curricula provides students the opportunity to develop their skills to critically evaluate, appraise, and apply nursing evidence as they advance their nursing education preparation. The purpose of this article is to describe strategies for student achievement of EBP competencies while progressing in baccalaureate, master's, and doctor of nursing practice (DNP) levels of the nursing curriculum.

BACKGROUND

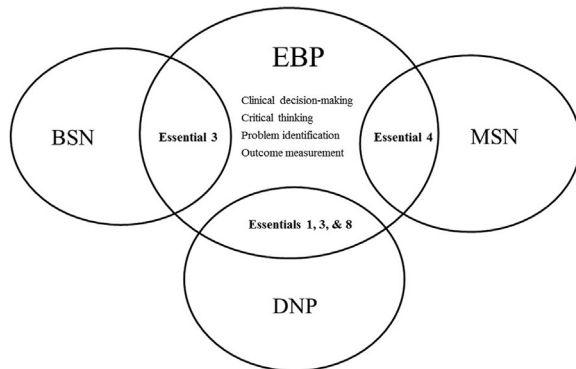
The core knowledge and competencies for all levels of academic nursing degrees set the foundation for essential curricular elements and expected outcomes. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing defined specific EBP competencies in The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice,² The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing,³ and The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice.⁴ Across all 3 levels,

EBP competencies include clinical decision making, critical thinking, problem identification, and outcome measurement (Figure 1).

The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice² Essential III outlined the competency of the baccalaureate, or baccalaureate equivalent, nursing student as the identification of pertinent practice issues, appraisal of the evidence surrounding practice issues, and evaluation of outcomes in essential. The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing³ expanded the EBP competencies of the baccalaureate level in Essential IV, translating and integrating scholarship into practice. Master's-prepared nurses are expected to implement and evaluate change in the practice area. The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice⁴ identified Essentials I, Scientific Underpinnings for Practice; III, Clinical Scholarship and Analytical Methods for Evidence-Based Practice; and VIII, Advanced Nursing Practice as the competencies for the translation of science and knowledge into nursing practice.

Achieving EBP competencies at each level of education enables nurses at all levels to participate in the provision of evidence-based health care that considers clinical expertise, patient values, and current research.^{5,6} The evolution of patient-centered

Figure 1. Integration of EBP-related competencies into leveled nursing education.



care, continued emphasis on patient safety and outcomes, enhanced quality of life, and management of health care knowledge have precipitated the prominence of EBP in nursing education.⁴ The patient-centered care model stresses the role of the patient as a key decision maker and member of the health care team.⁷ Central to the nursing discipline, patient safety and outcomes are now receiving added attention through national initiatives.⁸ Finally, exponential growth in the body of knowledge in health care necessitated a systematic method of knowledge management for the delivery of targeted and optimal patient care.⁹

LEVELING THE EBP CURRICULUM MODEL

The concept of leveling in curriculum development describes moving learners from simple to complex knowledge in a specific area of study.¹⁰ Therefore, EBP competencies across nursing curricula help to ensure student engagement with EBP at the appropriate competency level. The transition of EBP learning goals from the baccalaureate to master of science in nursing (MSN) and DNP levels provides a blueprint for the development and advancement of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Emphasis on a cumulative trajectory represents the domains of psychomotor,¹¹ affective,¹² and cognitive stages at each program level.¹³ Students evolve through feelings and build knowledge and skills by transitioning through each domain essential for clinical decision making, critical thinking, problem identification, and outcomes measurement.

At the baccalaureate level, students are introduced to EBP concepts to serve as the foundation for the EBP process. Students begin to identify the potential clinical questions as they become aware of current generalist nursing care problems. Using the EBP process to address practice issues, students are guided through the sequence of steps to review research and develop an EBP implementation plan.

At the master's level, students identify clinical inquiries using the Population/Patient Problem, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Time format. Students build confidence and develop proficiency assembling and applying best evidence to address advanced clinical practice problems. At the MSN level, application of the EBP process focuses on the value of change to the patient and the advanced practice registered nurse's role in implementing practice change. The master's level curriculum was designed to hone the skills of clinical decision making, critical thinking, problem identification, and measurement of outcomes to prepare students to transition to the DNP level.

Students at the DNP level identify and solve clinically relevant practice and system problems through means of evaluation and synthesis of research, experience, and patient values. Identifying and solving complex clinical problems requires highly developed EBP competencies; at this level, competencies are extensively integrated into the curriculum and learning activities throughout the transition from the baccalaureate-prepared nurse to DNP nurse leader.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF EBP EXPERIENCES ACROSS CURRICULAR LEVELS

Baccalaureate Level

An introductory EBP course provides students a foundation for nursing research and the EBP process. Emphasis is placed on the integration of nursing science with clinical judgment and patient preferences for care. Students gain knowledge about the contributions of qualitative and quantitative research to clinical practice. Knowledge development and the interrelationship among theory, practice, and research are consistent themes discussed throughout lecture and class activities. Students identify clinical

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