



Effective research without walls – Reflections on an international partnership

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Abstract The growth in international research collaboration is a substantial change from the research picture some time ago. Research 'without walls' is now a reality within the grasp of many nurse clinicians and researchers alike. The need to promote evidence and research based practice in the area of wound care is significant with communication being the 'key' to the success of research teams. The example we present here is of nurses working together on research in wound care. The paper profiles the strategies used in the development and facilitation of research in this important area of nursing care. This collaboration has culminated in a larger scale study anticipated to be conducted over 3 countries resulting in more networks being developed, truly opening up the internationalisation nursing research potential.

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Introduction

Effective and evidence based management of acute and chronic wounds is a care intervention that is practised internationally. There is a plethora of research and evidence that support interventions and a range of national and international guidance

that assist practitioners in planning, implementing and evaluating care delivered. As such health care professionals internationally need to collaborate with one another to improve and develop patient care ensuring that the patients' journey is based on the best available evidence. Despite the guidance for promoting best practice in wound care and maintaining skin integrity "An estimated one in ten patients is harmed while receiving hospital care in developed countries with a much higher rate being assumed in developing countries" (Storr, 2009, p. 145). Furthermore it has been approximated that up to 50% of morbidity and

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mortality rates could be avoided through improved patient safety in developing and developed countries (World Health Organisation, 2008). With the global nature of nursing, nurses can work together to develop practice and guidance for improvements to patient care. This clearly identifies that there is a need for healthcare practitioners to work together to improve the patient experience and improve patient outcomes. The discussion surrounding working collaboratively and internationally is not limited to clinical practitioners with Weber (2007), arguing that universities should embrace international activities that would project openness to the world of their processes, structures, activities and results which would influence decision making using international information. The development of social media, video conferencing, SKYPE and other forms of virtual communication allows for practitioners and researchers to share best practice and generate research that can be applied globally.

Australia's response to the increasing globalisation of research has resulted in an international strategy being formed. This strategy is a commitment to creating and enhancing international opportunities developed by a leading research peak body (ARC, 2011). Similarly, in the United Kingdom (UK), international research alliances are a rapidly growing area and co-authorship of publications are the most likely indicator of successful partnerships; the UK is similar to the USA, Canada and Australia in having a well-developed research base (Adams et al., 2007). This growth in internationalisation of knowledge is a substantial change from the research picture some 10 years ago where there was little evidence of cross fertilisation of the sharing of knowledge. The benefits of working internationally in health research and translation to practice activities for nurses include; opportunities for funding, and greater access to resources and the blending of expertise in nursing care from the perspective of the clinical and academic settings. In the evidence base many reasons have been suggested for research collaboration, including access to knowledge, cross fertilisation across organisations and across disciplines, visibility, concentration of knowledge and skills, increased access to potential research for higher degree students, maximising specialisation and increasing productivity (Heller and Michelassi, 2012; Melin, 2000; van Rijnsoever and Hessels, 2011). This paper articulates a systematic approach to initiating and sustaining an international nursing research collaboration and provides a real world example of this in action. The real world example offered

exists between nurse academics based at one University in the UK and one in Australia.

The costs of wound management

The economic and social impact of wounds on an individual, the health service and society are important considerations when balancing both economic and social cost: benefit of collaborations to advance practise and knowledge have been explored by (Posnett et al., 2009) who argued that this area of patient care deserves investigation into effective means of improving outcomes. The cost of wound care is noteworthy, with Posnett and Franks (2008) estimating annual spending on wound care to the NHS as being £2.3 bn and £3.1 billion a year (2005–2006 prices). The Department of Health [DH] in England, (2009a) approximated that an average district general hospital spends between £600,000 and £3 million each year on treating pressure ulcers and that this figure needs to be reduced. Posnett and Franks (2008) calculated that two hundred thousand people in the UK had a chronic wound with an estimated cost of treatment being £2.3–3.1 billion per year.

In the USA it is estimated that wound management costs the health service in excess of \$50 billion per year (Driver et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2004; Hess, 2004) and in Australia the cost of wound care to the health service has been estimated to be \$2.6 billion a year with this being the second most frequently billed item in general practice (Wound Management Innovation Co-operative Research Centre, 2010).

The need to promote evidence and research based practice in this area of nursing care is significant in the context of costs to the community, the patient/service user, their carers, and to health care organisations. The importance of promoting international research in wound care have been discussed by Cowman et al. (2012). The analysis of an international e-Delphi study identified research and education priorities in wound management and tissue repair. These authors argued that wound care research was essential to build evidence-based practice and was fundamental to development of quality in standards of practice (Cowman et al., 2012). In recognition of wound care being a specialist area of practice there has been an emergence of organisations whose aim is to develop research and evidence relating to wound care to improve care interventions through partnering with patients. These include, but are not limited to, the Wound Management Innovation

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