



Research Priorities for Children's Nursing in Ireland: A Delphi Study

Maria Brenner PhD, RCN^{a,*}, Carol Hilliard MSc, RCN^b, Geraldine Regan MA, RCN^b, Barbara Coughlan PhD, RGN^a, Sharon Hayden BSc, RCN^b, Jonathan Drennan PhD, RGN^c, Deirdre Kelleher MSc, RGN^a

^aSchool of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems, Health Sciences Building, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

^bOur Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Dublin 12, Ireland

^cCentre for Innovation and Leadership in Health Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO171BJ

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This paper is a report of a study which identified research priorities for children's nursing in an acute care setting in Ireland. A limited number of studies have examined research priorities for children's nursing. This study was undertaken against the backdrop of significant proposed changes to the delivery of children's healthcare. A three round Delphi survey design was used to identify and rate the importance of research priorities for children's nursing. In round I participants were asked to identify five of the most important research priorities for children's nursing. Participants in round II were asked to rate the importance of each research priority on a 7-point Likert scale. In round III participants were presented with the mean score of each research priority from the second questionnaire, and again asked to consider the importance of each topic on a 7-point Likert scale. The aim was to reach consensus on the priorities. The top three priorities identified were recognition and care of the deteriorating child, safe transfer of the critically ill child between acute health care facilities, and the child and family's perceptions of care at end-of life. The wide variation of priorities reflects the scope of care delivery of children's nurses and mirrors many global care concerns in caring for children.

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THE CALL FOR improved research in relation to ill health among children in Ireland was documented in *The National Children's Strategy: Our Children - Their Lives* (Government of Ireland, 2000). While acknowledging the importance of interdisciplinary research to address deficits in this area, this strategy did not identify specific priorities for research on child health or children's nursing. In 2003, the Department of Health and Children published a research strategy that suggested the need to identify research priorities in nursing

and midwifery (Department of Health & Children, 2003). The Nursing and Midwifery Research Priorities for Ireland study was subsequently undertaken in 2005 (National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing & Midwifery 2005), but did not specifically identify research priorities for children's nursing. The study on research priorities for children's nursing presented in this paper identifies and ranks the research priorities for nurses delivering care to children in an acute care setting in Ireland.

A number of studies have previously identified some research priorities for very specific areas of child health. These included a study on a parenting centre in Australia (Hauck, Kelly, & Fenwick, 2007), paediatric palliative care

* Corresponding author: Maria Brenner, PhD, RCN.
E-mail address: maria.brenner@ucd.ie.

priorities in Canada (Steele et al., 2008), a study to determine psychosocial research priorities for adolescents with implantable cardioverter defibrillators in the US (Zeigler & Decker-Waters, 2010), and determination of research priorities for young people with haematological cancer in Australia (Clinton-McHarg, Paul, Sanson-Fischer, D'Este, & Williamson, 2010). However, only one study was found which explored the research priorities for general child health, which was conducted in a tertiary referral hospital in Western Australia (Wilson, Ramelet, & Zuiderduyn, 2010). In this study 217 nurses identified research priorities relevant to patients and their families, which included health promotion strategies, impact on a family of a child requiring long-term care, non-compliance with treatment and models of home care. The lack of research on priorities for general child health indicated a need for more work in this area.

The current study attempted to bridge a gap in knowledge of research priorities in child health from the perspective of children's nursing in Ireland. The need for exploring research priorities for this discipline is against a backdrop of significant proposed changes to the delivery of children's health care. This change in health service delivery includes the centralisation of tertiary services currently delivered in three children's hospitals in Ireland in to a national centre, with a regionalised network support. This is important as Ireland has a very young population with over 1.1 million children (25% of the total population) under the age of 18. Of these children, approximately 10% are admitted to hospital per year (Department of Health & Children, 2012). At present there are approximately 4,500 children's nurses in Ireland, and it is anticipated that this new model of care will also support a more centralised and co-ordinated approach to research and education for this group of health care professionals.

Given the relative absence of research priorities for children's nursing, this study was an opportune juncture to seek consensus on such priorities at the beginning of a new chapter in the delivery of health care to children. The need for this study was identified through a joint research liaison group between a children's hospital in Ireland, which provides the majority of tertiary care services for children, and its associated university which provides education to children's nurses at undergraduate and graduate level. Given the study setting, the findings may also help inform research priorities for nurses caring for children in other large centers globally.

Methods

Aim

The aim of the study was to identify research priorities for children's nursing, with the following specific objectives:

- inform the development of a research agenda for children's nursing in an acute hospital setting

- inform the contribution of children's nursing research to wider interdisciplinary programmes of research on child health through the dissemination and discussion of these research priorities at interdisciplinary research conferences.

Design

The Delphi method provided a framework for this study to identify and rate the importance of child health research priorities. Originally developed in the 1950s in the US (Dalkey, 1969), the technique is defined as "a group facilitation technique that seeks to obtain consensus in areas where research is lacking" (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna 2000, p.1010). The process has common core elements; it is an iterative process of several rounds in which participants with particular expertise anonymously complete a questionnaire, to achieve consensus in the chosen area of exploration. The Delphi survey design was chosen as it had previously been identified as an appropriate design to capture nurses' views of the most important and most urgent problems that need to be addressed (Bayley, MacLean, Desy, & McMahan, 2004; Drennan et al., 2007). The process of the Delphi survey technique in this study involved a series of data collection rounds with nurses working in the children's hospital. Responses from each round were summarized and analysed in between rounds; feedback was sent to the nurses in subsequent rounds to enable group consensus to be achieved; this is the central tenet of the Delphi technique (Lindeman, 1975). The three round Delphi method used in this study is outlined in Figure 1.

Participant Recruitment

The study was set in a large acute children's hospital in the Republic of Ireland which provides many of the country's national children's specialist services. A total of three rounds of questionnaires were used to identify the research priorities for children's nursing.

In round 1, the eligibility criteria was all Assistant Directors of Nursing (ADoN), advanced nurse practitioners (ANP), Clinical Nurse Specialists, Clinical Nurse Managers (CNM) (all grades), clinical nurse facilitators (CNF) (ward based staff educators) and nurses with 3 or more years experience from a service in which there was no CNM, CNF or CNS. This group was selected as they would be able to identify the research priorities relevant to their areas and to children's nursing in general; many of the clinical nurse managers included were just one grade above a staff nurse and carried a clinical caseload.

Round I yielded a large number of important topics which the research team felt were of broad interest to all nurses. This outcome, plus the belief that an all-inclusive study would lend greater support for the development of a culture of research among nurses, led to the decision by the research

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