

The incorporation of research into a 2-year practical nursing diploma program



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KEYWORDS:

PN nursing diploma;
Research incorporation
methods;
Research incorporation
guidelines

Abstract

Research utilization is becoming increasingly important in the nursing field. The aim of this study was to provide an overview and test a pilot method of research incorporation into a practical nursing program at the author's institution. The advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of incorporating research into college-level practical nursing programs are outlined and discussed.

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1. Introduction

Nurses constitute one of the largest groups of health care practitioners and are monumental in providing initial patient health care (Mittelman, 2010). Three main levels exist in Canada in nursing practice: registered practical nurses (RPNs), registered nurses (RNs), and nurse practitioners (NPs; C.N.O., 2011b, 2012). As part of their legal scope of practice, RPNs provide care for less complex patient scenarios, collaborate with RNs during their practice, meet identified nursing needs, perform nursing interventions, and represent nursing and nursing care issues (C.N.O., 2012). According to the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), entry-level RPNs must “have a knowledge base in nursing, health and social sciences, ethics, leadership, and research, ..., review literature and consult with colleagues and other resources in selecting assessment tools or

techniques, ... [and] ... critique and integrate research findings from nursing, and health and social sciences into one's practice” (C.N.O., 2011a). These CNO requirements illustrate the importance of appropriate resource utilization, participation in research data collection, and utilization of research to inform the RPN's practice (C.N.O., 2012).

The CNO has therefore set the precedence for the crucial role that research partakes in the practice of the RPN. In addition to fulfilling CNO requirements, incorporating research into the practical nursing (PN) curriculum will offer numerous advantages such as fostering positive relationships within communities, offering support to the nursing process, developing a positive attitude toward research, and facilitating the perception of fewer barriers toward implementation and participation in research during nursing practice (Florin, Ehrenberg, Wallin, & Gustavsson, 2012; Ireland, 2006; Niven, Roy, Schaefer, Gasquoine, & Ward, 2013). It will also allow the establishment of interdisciplinary teams of students and faculty working together on all aspects of the research project and formation of collegial collaborations based on trust,

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integrity, respect, and ethical practices (Broome, Ironside, & McNelis, 2012; Wilkes & Jackson, 2013). The incorporation of research into curriculum does present some challenges; many of these challenges have been reported by university programs offering 4-year nursing degrees and include a lack of time, peer support, authority, confidence, interest, and knowledge to set up nursing-related research projects within the program (Breimaier, Halfens, & Lohrmann, 2011; Corchon, Portillo, Watson, & Saracibar, 2011; Heaslip, Hewitt-Taylor, & Rowe, 2012; Roxburgh, 2006). In addition, nursing programs tend to have demanding curricula and large enrollment numbers, both of which place a substantial demand on faculty and can limit their ability to conduct and participate in educational nursing research (Broome et al., 2012; Vessey & DeMarco, 2008). Additional pressing barriers include the absence of well-developed methodology to incorporate research into nursing programs by management and the provision of insufficient protected time from teaching and other duties to perform research (Adderly-Kelly, 2003; Broome et al., 2012). The multiple challenges faced by universities incorporating research in 4-year nursing degrees gives rise to the notion that colleges embarking on offering research components in their 2-year diploma programs would face similar challenges in addition to more complex barriers related to selecting appropriate methods to incorporate research into the curriculum, a general lack of administrative assistance to support research, a lack of infrastructure to support the research program, and the lack of knowledge and aptitude among college-level students embarking on research within the PN program.

Despite the integral role for research in the RPN's profession and practice, there still remains a challenge in integrating research with teaching and clinical practice in 2-year nursing diploma programs. The aim of this article was therefore to consider methods for incorporating research into the 2-year PN diploma program at the college. The college, whose identity will remain anonymous in this article, has a presence in three urban locations within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA; located in the Canadian province of Ontario): Brampton, Mississauga, and Oakville. These three GTA cities tend to exhibit a high amount of multicultural diversity; this is reflected in the student population at the college, which attracts a high percentage of international students across all three campuses. The predominant population of students in the PN program at the college however tends to be domestic students with less than a 1% presence of international students within each intake. The program also tends to have a predominant female presence, with approximately 67% of each intake consisting of female students and the remaining 33% male students. Intake into the PN program occurs three times within the academic year (during the fall, winter, and spring/summer semesters) with an average of 1,132 students applying in total for all three intakes. Acceptance into the program is highly competitive and, on average, is granted to 200 students from all three intakes combined. General ways to incorporate research into the nursing curriculum are outlined in this article, and a sample method to incorporate research into

the 2-year PN program at the college is described. A discussion is then provided on the merits and challenges faced with this method; additional valuable insights are also provided regarding initiating and maintaining the research project. Finally, recommendations are made regarding alternative and appropriate methods that can be used to incorporate research into the PN program at the college.

2. Practice setting

RNs, RPNs, and NPs contribute to the overall autonomous care that the client will receive yet have varying levels in terms of scopes of practice. RNs and RPNs study from the same body of knowledge; however, RNs tend to study 4 years, whereas RPNs graduate from 2-year diploma programs. According to the Nursing Act instated in 1991 in Canada, nurses are allowed to perform several controlled acts during client care and as part of their scope of practice; the difference between RPNs and RNs is illustrated within the authority to initialize and decide on these controlled acts (C.N.O., 2012). Within a practical setting, the decision to utilize an RN versus RPN depends on client case complexity, predictability of client outcomes and future care requirements, and the risk of occurrence of negative outcomes (C.N.O., 2012). NPs represent the third and a higher level of nursing practice; NPs are RNs within the extended class who have obtained additional nursing education and experience allowing an expansion of their scope of practice (C.N.O., 2011b). The role of the NP is an advanced one and has been introduced as a means to encourage the incorporation of research within the role of the nurse (Loke, Laurensen, & Lee, 2014).

The PN program at the college is a 2-year diploma program (divided into four semesters) that prepares students for a career as an RPN. During the program duration, students are introduced to topics such as fundamentals of nursing, self and profession, anatomy and disease conditions, pharmacology, health assessment, realities of practice, family care nursing, and mental health nursing. At the culmination of the 2-year program, graduates are provided with the skills and knowledge to practice as a PN within a professional health care team. Research, despite its importance, is only addressed at a superficial level; this is unfortunate because PNs require an orientation to various research topics as per the CNO requirements. To that extent, PNs typically require an introduction to levels of evidence, data collection, research methodologies, critical thinking, differences between quantitative and qualitative research, American Psychological Association (APA) referencing, reading and identifying professional peer-reviewed articles, performing literature searches, critically appraising peer-reviewed articles, and producing high-quality reports on select nursing relevant research topics.

3. Methods used by nursing programs to integrate research into curriculum

Research is an integral aspect of the nurse's training and can empower their clinical performance and help them

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