



The integration and evaluation of a social-media facilitated journal club to enhance the student learning experience of evidence-based practice: A case study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nurses are required to interpret and apply knowledge so communities will receive care based on best available evidence, as opposed to care that is simply based on tradition or authority. Fostering nursing students' critical appraisal skills will assist in their capacity to engage with, interpret and use best evidence. Journal clubs are frequently used approach to engage learners with research and develop critical appraisal skills. Given new flipped and blended approaches to teaching and learning there is need to rejuvenate how research is utilised and integrated within journal clubs to maximise engagement and translation of evidence.

Purpose: This paper provides a case study of a single site Australian university experience of transitioning a traditional physical journal club, to a social media-facilitated club within a postgraduate health subject to stimulate and facilitate engagement with the chosen manuscripts.

Data Sources: This case study is based on our own experiences, supported by literature and includes qualitative comments obtained via student feedback surveys during November 2015.

Design: Case study.

Implications for Nursing and Conclusion: Social media-facilitated journal clubs offer an efficient way to continue developing critical appraisal skills in nursing students. The integration of a social media-facilitated journal clubs increased student attention, engagement with presented activities and overall student satisfaction within this evidence-based practice subject. Future rigorously-designed, large-scale studies are required to evaluate the impact of online journal clubs on the uptake of evidence-based practice, including those resulting in improved patient outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Nurses are required to interpret and apply knowledge to provide care to patients based on best available evidence, as opposed to care that is simply based on tradition or authority (Greenhalgh, 2010). A key challenge for the higher education sector and the continuing education of health care professionals is the provision of skills, knowledge and values

that promote critical and responsible consumption, adaptation and application of research evidence, policies and guidelines to practice. Documented barriers to optimising the use of evidence in clinical practice include those related to cultural context, resources and economics, and workforce (Greenhalgh, 2010). These include clinicians not being prepared or adequately skilled to access relevant high quality evidence related to clinical need in a timely fashion, lacking skills in the quality appraisal of different types of literature, and lacking understanding and appreciation of the evidence-based practice movement in modern day healthcare (Hoffman et al., 2010; Cullum et al., 2008; Greenhalgh, 2010). Negative stereotypes and general disinterest have been noted in relation to educational strategies that have objectives aimed at evidence implementation (Tetley and Glover, 1999). Similarly, academics also report negative attitudes, anxiety and distress related to teaching these subjects (Burrows

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and Baillie, 1997; Perkins, 1992). Reasons for both students' and academics' dissatisfaction with these core subjects are complex and multifaceted, although current teaching methods have been identified as a major contributing factor (Halcomb and Peters, 2009). Adopting different teaching methods such as blended and flipped approaches; reflection and the integration of online activities are alternative strategies that may potentially increase students' knowledge and translation of evidence (Halcomb and Peters, 2009). Blended and flipped approaches, may include where students are taught through a combination of traditional instruction (face to face) as well as being required to engage in activities out of the class, generally using a range of technological resources and effectively freeing class time for more student centred activities (O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). There is great focus on embedding social media validated tools for learning in university, driven by general interest and the widespread use.

This paper discusses a novel approach to engage postgraduate nursing students in developing critical appraisal skills, such as paying attention to and evaluating source information, methods, and interpretation of results, in evidence-based practice (Bowles et al., 2013).

If the knowledge translation capacity of postgraduate students is to be enhanced it is essential that as a professional nursing continues to develop and evaluate innovative models that better support academics responsible for provision of these core subjects. Evidence-based practice is a systematic empirical approach that has evolved out of recognition that the profession's body of knowledge is constantly changing. Evidence suggesting best methods of practice today may change in the future as more knowledge is produced. The task of staying abreast, although challenging, is facilitated when one has the ability to locate and critically appraise evidence, and decide on whether to incorporate it into every day practice. Having the ability to critically evaluate an evolving body of evidence and then translate or integrate this knowledge into practice is a complex process, yet vital to improving outcomes, as it may eliminate ineffective or harmful practices. It requires professionals to actively seek out new, more effective scientifically proven practices and to discard practices shown to be ineffective or harmful (Greenhalgh, 2010).

Bridging the divide between evidence and practice is important, given the aging population, innovations in treatment, and global fiscal constraints. Evidence-based nursing is much more than simply reading research articles (Greenhalgh, 2010). Nurses are required to engage with research, gain skills in appraisal of research studies, and develop critical literacy habits, which journal clubs have previously achieved. Journal clubs are a low cost and pragmatic method making clinicians more aware of research and able to meet the requirements of regulatory authorities to deliver evidence-based care (Hunt and Topham, 2002). Further, registered nurses have a responsibility and duty of care to remain abreast with new evidence to inform best practice and provide evidence-based care (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), 2010). Therefore, developing critical literacy habits and appraisal skills is fundamental to the provision of evidence-based care to patients. Within the contemporary higher education setting, universities are moving towards flipped and blended pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning (Hung and Chou, 2015; O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). Flipped classrooms in nurse programmes can have favourable academic outcomes and increased student satisfaction (Betihavas et al., n.d.). As part of a university-wide flipped learning strategy, the case study discussed within this paper aimed to 'flip' a classroom-based journal club to an online format for postgraduate nursing students, enrolled in a Masters of Advanced Nursing course.

1.1. Purpose

- 1) This paper aims to present a case study sharing the experience of academics in developing and embedding a social media-facilitated journal club within a postgraduate health subject.

- 2) The aim of the social media-based journal club was to improve critical appraisal skills of research studies in postgraduate nursing students. This was achieved through an augmented learning experience combining both face-to-face and digital learning approaches.

The conduct of this study was approved by the Human Research & Ethics Committee of the University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

1.2. Data Sources

This case study is based on our own experiences, supported by literature and includes qualitative comments obtained via student feedback surveys during November 2015.

2. Background

2.1. Traditional Journal Club Components

There are vast arrays of models of journal clubs, many with similar conceptual underpinning principles. Some use standardised critical appraisal tools, and the usual format may include approx. 1-hour timeframe, on a once per month basis. The following 13 components are proposed by Honey and Baker (2011) as essential features to successful journal clubs (Honey and Baker, 2011). They include: 1) using a stated working definition, clearly stated focus and ground rules; 2) operating with management approval; 3) using a critical appraisal tool or reading guide; 4) to be question driven where questions are mainly generated from participants; 5) voluntary attendance; 6) situated within a work-based venue during regular work hours; 7) multidisciplinary; 8) limit participant numbers; 9) take place once a month for 1 h during; 10) papers are shared prior to meeting; 11) to include participation of a clinical librarian, statistician, or other consultant; 12) include triangulation of outcome measures of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours; and 13) offer continuing professional development (CPD) hours as incentives for participation.

2.2. Online Journal Clubs

Online journal clubs are not new. Many specialties have been working with various approaches to online-based journal clubs since the advent of the Internet. Koppersmith and colleagues reported over 15 years ago on an email-based distribution system mode of journal clubbing (Koppersmith et al., 1997). They report the main advantages as removing geographic boundaries and overcoming time restrictions. A key advantage of this system in 1997 was that anyone with internet access could participate via an email distribution journal club channel. Approximately 15 years later, in 2012, the WeNurses Twitter community was born. WeNurses is a Twitter-based discussion group for nurses that was launched in July 2012, by registered nurse, Teresa Chinn. Since this global Twitter nursing community has grown exponentially, and continues to host weekly Twitterchats on different topics such as hand-over, infection prevention, communication and compassion (Moorley and Chinn).

Many other disciplines and specialties have leveraged Twitter as a platform to host Twitterchats amongst colleagues, and to chat and share scholarly discussion and critical evaluation of research studies (e.g. the Journal of General Internal Medicine and the International Urology Journal Club) (Mehta and Flickinger, 2014; Thangasamy et al., 2014). The International Urology Journal Club (#urojc) has been one of the more successful ongoing chats, attracting 189 unique users from 19 countries and 6 continents over 12 months in 2012–2013. These data demonstrate the success such initiatives have, which would have not been as practical or achievable pre-Twitter. There remains scope to qualitatively evaluate the experiences of clinician-users, and patient care and outcomes as a result of participation in such continuing professional development activities.

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