

# Utilizing Research Findings: *Nurse Leaders and Researchers Working Together*

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A key component of the Magnet Recognition Program<sup>®</sup> is to increase new knowledge through the participation and dissemination of nursing research.<sup>1</sup> To conduct a research study requires extensive effort from researchers and leaders in planning, designing, and implementing, as well as effort from

respondents. Additionally, expenses associated with research can include, not only the investigator's time, but stakeholder input and human subjects review. Thus, it is imperative that research findings result in meaningful change within the institution conducting the research, in addition to professional dissemination.

**A**lthough traditional research dissemination includes scholarly presentation and publication, hospitals with Magnet® accreditation are expected to specifically disseminate research findings to internal and external audiences, and to demonstrate translation of new knowledge into practice.<sup>2</sup> A criticism of traditional scholarly dissemination is that it can stop with the simple sharing of knowledge instead of using the evidence to implement meaningful change. Moreover, rather than waiting until the dissemination phase to share findings, researchers and administrators can work together to promote the research process and the utilization of findings throughout the entire research study. The purpose of this article is to describe how nurse researchers and nurse leaders can design, implement, and utilize hospital-based research study findings within a health system, employing a multihospital leadership study as an exemplar, as well as providing strategies for improving research dissemination. This article focuses on how to effectively use hospital-based research study findings, as opposed to the passive dissemination of research findings for general knowledge and the use of literature for supporting evidence-based practice projects in hospitals.

## BACKGROUND

Research dissemination can be described as “the purposeful communication of research, particularly, the findings and implications of those findings to members of society who can utilize them.”<sup>3</sup> Too often, diffusion, dissemination, and implementation are used interchangeably. Lomas<sup>4</sup> clearly describes the distinction of the 3 separate processes. Diffusion is the passive transmission of information, likely through the publication and potential reading of an article in an academic journal. Although this traditional form of knowledge transfer is useful and potentially prestigious, those in need of the information often do not regularly read these journals and are required to seek out the knowledge, sifting through copious amounts of information.<sup>4,5</sup> A more active form of knowledge transfer is dissemination, which tailors to specific audiences and is evidenced through workshops, practice guidelines, and presentations. This approach targets a specific audience to deliver content that meets their needs.<sup>5</sup> Implementation is the most active form of dissemination, requiring actions associated with the knowledge transfer and addressing barriers and limitations.<sup>4</sup> More recently, knowledge exchange has also been used to define how researchers can engage stakeholders and increase collaboration. In knowledge exchange and implementation, dissemination strategies are planned in advance and activities are created to share research findings or address issues related to the findings.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, nurses in hospitals use a variety of strategies to effectively disseminate and implement research findings. A focus of nursing is to conduct diffusion and dissemination through staff-led groups, such as shared governance and nursing grand rounds in order to educate and spark a spirit of inquiry in clinicians.<sup>6</sup> An environment that promotes a spirit of inquiry is one that promotes the questioning of practice and can generate a line of questioning to produce practice improvement or evidence-based practice projects.<sup>7</sup> In these scenarios, current evi-

dence in the form of published literature is used to support the need for the improvement or practice change.

## UTILIZING RESEARCH FINDINGS: AN EXEMPLAR

To effectively utilize research findings, the design of the study should account for pre-research activities, continued promotion throughout the research study, internal and external dissemination, and translation of findings. As an exemplar to illustrate the planning, dissemination, and implementation of research findings, we describe a multihospital research study conducted on transformational leadership (TFL) at a health system in the southwest United States to illustrate each of these components.

### Leadership Study

The goal of the research was to examine the relationship between participation in a formal leadership program and the adoption of a leadership style at 3 different levels of nursing leadership. The researchers and nurse leaders essentially wanted to know whether a home-grown leadership academy was promoting TFL behaviors in their 3 levels of nursing leadership: clinical managers, senior clinical managers, and directors. In their 23-hospital health system, clinical managers are described as the most direct interaction with the staff and are compared to charge nurses or team leaders. Senior clinical managers handle operational responsibilities such as budget and staffing. Directors have oversight of multiple departments or services lines and have ultimate responsibility. The research study included surveying leader's demographics, the number of modules taken in the formal leadership training academy, and TFL practices using the 30-item, validated Leadership Practices Inventory.<sup>8</sup> Results from the research study yielded a sample of more than 500 nurses, demonstrating that the formal leadership training academy had minimal effect on nurses TFL behaviors. Instead, higher education (i.e., moving from a bachelor's to a master's degree) was the most influential predictor of TFL practices.

### Pre-Research Activities/Promotion of New Knowledge

A key component of successfully utilizing findings is bringing in stakeholders before initiating the research. Often stakeholder support is garnered for recruitment for research activities without discussing dissemination plans as a pre-research activity. Prior to initiating the research project a presentation was made to the leadership of the health system (chief nursing officers, professional practice directors, and human resources/talent management groups) to ensure they would fully support the work. This helped support recruitment efforts for ensuring a high response rate, but also identified the concerns of the leadership and their perceived areas where improvement could be made. As a result, additional outcome variables were added to the study that were useful for making change, the sample criteria was reduced, and the measure of training was refined.

Additionally, pre-research activities to promote the research can boost research finding utilization. Because of the multihospital nature of the study, recruitment for data collection was

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