RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

Where to start with research

by Kristen Haase and Dawn Stacey

INTRODUCTION

A key element of oncology nursing is evidence-informed care. Research approaches can be used for conducting original research and for bringing evidence to the bedside. Therefore, getting your feet wet in research doesn’t have to be a daunting proposition.

Simply put, research is a systematic way to answer questions or solve problems (Polit & Beck, 2012). Research begins with a research question or a researchable problem. This problem should be something that attracts your interest and is relevant to your clinical practice. After determining the research problem, the next steps include: (1) finding evidence to answer your question (via the literature or conducting a new study), (2) discerning if the findings are relevant, (3) applying the findings to your nursing practice; and (4) disseminating findings in a practice-based or research-based article. The following provides simple strategies for getting involved with research (see Table 1).

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Table 1: Where to start with research

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<thead>
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<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Where to start</th>
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<tr>
<td>Find research to answer a question</td>
<td>• Clinical practice guidelines</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Systematic reviews</td>
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<td>Read research articles</td>
<td>• Review Sosido</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Making a commitment to read one article or more a month</td>
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<td>Join a journal club or community of practice</td>
<td>• Connect with local colleagues or those on Twitter or social media</td>
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<td>Enroll in graduate studies</td>
<td>• Take a course as a special student</td>
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<td>• Talk to current students or recent graduates</td>
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FIND RESEARCH TO ANSWER A QUESTION

Since the inception of the Internet it’s much easier to access journal articles to answer questions. However, this ease of access can be overwhelming due to the sheer volume of new literature emerging each day. A few disciplined strategies can help simplify the process and help you find literature to answer your question or solve the problem.

First, it is good to think about the question and its characteristics. For example, what are the various synonyms for the problem? Who is the patient population (e.g., adults versus children)? Where is the care being provided? What is the outcome you want to achieve?

Second, look for clinical practice guidelines and/or systematic reviews. Both provide a synthesis of findings from multiple studies. Clinical practice guidelines can be found by going to the National Guideline Clearinghouse (http://www.guideline.gov/) or websites for specific nursing organizations that produce guidelines (e.g., Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology [CANO], Oncology Nursing Society, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario). Systematic reviews can be found by conducting a search in PubMed, Google Scholar, and/or going to the Cochrane Library. Then, if necessary, re-conduct the search for individual studies.

READ RESEARCH ARTICLES/JOURNALS

Another option is simply to read research and be aware of the latest studies in your area of nursing practice. One approach is to choose a topic you are passionate about, and a journal you feel is important to your practice, for instance, Canadian Oncology Nursing Journal or Cancer Nursing. Sosido is a resource available to all members of CANO that shares newly published articles by members and other new articles in journals that are relevant to oncology nursing. Make a commitment to read one article a month, one issue a month or whatever is reasonable. By choosing a topic that you are interested in, it will be easier to stick to your goal.

PARTICIPATE IN OR START A JOURNAL CLUB

A more social option is to participate in a journal club. Journal clubs provide an opportunity to meet with other nurses to discuss a journal article and can aid in interpreting and applying research to practice (Steenbeek et al., 2009). Journal clubs have different foci; they might be focused on a particular practice area, research method or a specific disease group. Journal clubs allow
you to deepen your understanding of the research process by learning more about a journal article in a social and relaxed setting. Journal clubs can meet in person at regular intervals (monthly), online, or using Twitter (Thangasamy et al., 2014).

JOIN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Communities of Practice (CoP) present another opportunity for nurses to discuss research and its relevance to their practice. CoPs are defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). CoPs provide one avenue to keep up to date with the evidence-based care taking place at other institutions or different areas of the same institution and have been shown to encourage buy-in from CoP participants, enhance satisfaction with leadership and knowledge translation (Barwick, Peters, & Boydell, 2009; Bentley, Browman, & Poole, 2010). CoPs have an important place in nursing, because nurses are reported to learn better in social, interactive and practice oriented settings (Estabrooks, 2003). Although CoPs do not involve conducting research, participation allows nurses to see how evidence is translated into clinical settings. They may also provide an opportunity to share knowledge amongst members.

ENROLL IN GRADUATE STUDIES

If you’re ready to go a little further with research, pursuing graduate studies is an option. Graduate studies will allow you to gain deeper theoretical and methodological insights into the discipline of nursing and the process of research. Most Master’s and PhD programs in nursing involve classes that prepare you for conducting independent research. Graduate work also gives you a structured environment and opportunity to see a study through from start to finish with the support of a supervisor. A graduate degree can also open up new career opportunities, specifically if you are interested in a more research-intensive role. To start, you may want to take a course as a special student or speak to those currently enrolled in prospective programs.

LAST THOUGHTS

Research is an essential aspect of the nursing discipline, but getting involved in research can seem overwhelmingly and complex. In this article we’ve presented a few simple activities that can get you more interested and familiar with research, that can be done in groups or individually, and don’t all require advanced training or education.

REFERENCES


