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Editorial

Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing: The Pathway to Optimal Patient Care

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is an essential cornerstone of modern nursing, bridging the gap between research, clinical expertise, and patient preferences to provide the highest standard of care (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019). As healthcare systems evolve and become increasingly complex, the demand for care that is safe, effective, and guided by the latest evidence has never been greater (Saunders et al., 2019). For nurses, EBP is more than a set of guidelines or a passing trend; it is a professional responsibility that directly impacts patient outcomes and the quality of care delivered (Stevens, 2013).

At its core, EBP in nursing is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients (Sackett et al., 1996). This approach integrates the best available research, clinical expertise, and patient values into the decision-making process. Unlike traditional methods that may rely solely on clinical experience or historical practices, EBP emphasizes the importance of scientific research in shaping care practices (Ellis, 2019).

EBP is grounded in several key components. These include Best Available Evidence, Clinical Expertise, and Patient Preferences and Values (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019).

Best Available Evidence refers to the most relevant and current research findings, often derived from systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), meta-analyses, and other peer-reviewed studies (Polit & Beck, 2021). Clinical Expertise implies nurses apply their professional knowledge and skills, gained through experience and formal education, to interpret and integrate the evidence into patient care (Craig & Smyth, 2020). In EBP, patient preferences and values are paramount, emphasizing patient-centered care. Nurses must consider patients' preferences, cultural values, and specific circumstances when making clinical decisions (Epstein & Street, 2011). By using these components together, EBP enhances the nursing profession's ability to provide individualized, high-quality care based on the latest scientific evidence (Melnyk et al., 2022).

Nurses play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of EBP. As the frontline providers of care, nurses are uniquely positioned to observe patient outcomes, identify clinical issues, and apply research findings in real-time practice (Stevens, 2013). However, the transition from traditional practice to EBP requires a cultural shift within healthcare organizations, as well as a commitment from all healthcare professionals to prioritize the integration of research into clinical decision-making (Lehane et al., 2019).

The process of implementing EBP typically involves several steps. These steps include: 1) Asking the right questions; 2) Gathering the best evidence; 3) Critically appraising the evidence; 4) Applying the evidence; 5) Evaluating the outcomes (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019).

The first step, asking the right questions, is formulating clinical questions based on patient care concerns. Using the PICO (T) format, Patient/Population, Intervention, Comparison,

Outcome, and Time helps to structure clinical questions that guide research and inform practice decisions.

In the second step, gathering the best evidence, nurses must identify and gather the most relevant and credible sources of evidence to address the clinical question. This may involve reviewing systematic reviews, clinical guidelines, or primary research articles.

The third step, critically appraising the evidence, suggests that once the evidence is collected, nurses need to assess its quality, relevance, and applicability. This step involves evaluating the strength of the evidence, its methodology, and its potential impact on patient outcomes.

In the fourth step, applying the evidence, the evidence is then integrated into clinical practice, with consideration of the patient's unique preferences, values, and circumstances. Nurses must collaborate with other healthcare professionals to ensure that the evidence is implemented effectively in the care plan.

Finally, in the last step, evaluating the outcomes, nurses assess the outcomes of the EBP intervention, reviewing whether the patient's condition improved as expected. This ongoing evaluation ensures that care remains dynamic, responsive, and continuously optimized based on patient needs and evidence (Dang & Dearholt, 2022; Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019; Polit & Beck, 2021).

While the benefits of EBP are clear, its widespread adoption in nursing faces several challenges. These challenges include a lack of time, limited access to resources, resistance to change, and inadequate training (Lehane et al., 2019).

Lack of time is a huge challenge nurses face, particularly in the current healthcare system. Nurses often work in fast-paced environments, where the demands of patient care may leave little time for engaging with the latest research or implementing evidence-based changes.

Limited access to resources specifically describes the available sources of knowledge for nurses to update their knowledge. Many nurses face difficulties accessing up-to-date research or evidence-based guidelines due to limited access to academic journals or electronic databases.

Resistance to change remains a persistent challenge in many healthcare settings. This resistance often stems from deeply rooted traditional practices, practitioners' long-held beliefs, and a general mistrust of new evidence. When emerging research contradicts established routines, some individuals may be reluctant to adapt. Addressing this issue requires not only strong leadership support but also a broader shift in organizational culture to promote openness, continuous learning, and EBP.

Inadequate training is a significant challenge, as not all nurses receive comprehensive preparation in EBP. As a result, many may feel uncertain about how to critically appraise research or integrate evidence into clinical decision-making. This gap contributes to unwarranted variations in healthcare delivery, where some professionals, often depending on geographic location, have greater access to training and development opportunities, while others receive minimal or no support. Bridging this disparity requires strong policy and political commitment, along with continuous education and structured mentorship. Such efforts are essential to empower nurses to engage meaningfully and confidently in EBP (Lehane et al., 2019; Melnyk

et al., 2022; Shayan et al., 2019; Warren et al., 2016).

Promoting EBP in nursing requires robust, well-planned strategies to effectively address the existing challenges (Craig & Smyth, 2020). To move forward, healthcare organizations and nursing leaders must foster a culture that supports, values, and actively encourages the use of evidence in clinical decision-making. This transformation can be achieved through a range of targeted strategies, each designed to counteract the barriers previously identified. The key strategies are outlined below.

Education and Training: Providing ongoing education and professional development on evidence-based practice is essential. Nursing schools, continuing education programs, and in-service training sessions can equip nurses with the skills needed to navigate research and apply evidence in clinical practice.

Access to Resources: Ensuring that nurses have access to research databases, journals, and clinical guidelines is critical. Healthcare organizations can initiate offering subscriptions to online journals or have furnished libraries with dedicated librarians who can assist nurses in locating evidence-based resources.

Fostering a Culture of EBP: Institutional leadership must support and advocate for evidence-based practice by providing the necessary resources, time, and encouragement. Creating a culture that values research and continuous improvement in health care context will help overcome resistance and integrate EBP into everyday nursing practice.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: EBP is not solely the responsibility of nurses. It is a collaborative effort that requires input from physicians, pharmacists, social workers, and other healthcare professionals. Working together ensures that evidence-based care is holistic, well-rounded, and patient-centered (Lehane et al., 2019; Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019; Warren et al., 2016)

The future of EBP in nursing is bright, with ongoing advances in research, technology, and healthcare delivery. As more nurses engage in research, both in practice and in academic settings, EBP will continue to shape the future of patient care. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and machine learning are opening new frontiers for evidence generation and decision support, offering nurses even more tools to improve patient outcomes (Topaz & Pruinelli, 2017).

Additionally, the growing emphasis on patient-centered care will continue to highlight the importance of incorporating patient preferences into evidence-based decision-making. As nurses become more involved in research, EBP will also continue to evolve to meet the diverse and complex needs of patients, ensuring that care is not only effective but also compassionate and personalized.

EBP is a transformative force in nursing that leads to safer, more effective care for patients. It empowers nurses to make informed decisions that enhance patient outcomes, improve quality of care, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. However, its full potential can only be realized when barriers are addressed, and nurses are provided with the necessary tools, education, and support. As nursing professionals, it is our responsibility to continue integrating the best available evidence into our daily practice, ensuring that our patients receive

the highest quality of care based on the most current and reliable information. Through commitment, collaboration, and ongoing education, EBP will continue to be the cornerstone of nursing excellence

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Dr. A.V. Pramuditha Madhavi

Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka.
Editor-in-Chief, SLJN
Email: avpma@ou.ac.lk https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8767-7765