

NURSES' USE AND UNDERSTANDING OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE: SOME PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE

Findings from a recently reported study on evidence-based practice (EBP) in nursing revealed both encouraging as well as concerning findings. The vast majority (90%) of the more than 500 registered nurses (RNs) who participated in the study reported using EBP. However, a substantial proportion (69%) of RNs also indicated they have only a low to moderate level of understanding of EBP.

Earlier this year, Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI), the Honor Society of Nursing, conducted an online, electronic survey of active RNs in the United States,¹ issuing invitations via e-mail to nurses whose e-mail addresses were obtained from a trio of nurse marketing lists. A total of 565 nurses agreed to participate, affording a 95% confidence level in the representativeness of findings. A brief profile of respondents to the survey is provided in the Table.

STTI² defines EBP as “an integration of the best evidence available, nursing expertise, and the values and preferences of the individuals, families and communities who are served.” The value of EBP lies in its ability to not only minimize the translation time required for implementation of research findings into nursing practice, but to help approximate the edges that lie among and

between ritualistic practices, habitual approaches, personal preferences, anecdotal experiences, empirical data, and unequivocal statistical significance to support current nursing practice. Ideally, EBP provides critical care nurses with the best available evidence to support nursing care of acute and critically ill patients and their families.

Use of Evidence-Based Practice

The STTI survey results suggest that EBP is gaining not only recognition but also expanding application in nursing:

- 90% of respondents reported that they need to access and apply EBP at least occasionally (1 to 2 times per month);
- 64% of RNs related that their needs for evidence upon which to plan nursing care arise either weekly (34%) or multiple times each week (30%); and
- 73% of RNs perceived that an adequate amount of information related to EBP was both available and accessible to them. Sixty percent of participants rated these resources as “adequate” and another 13% rated them as “more than adequate.” Perceived adequacy of information was especially true among respondents who had entered nursing within the previous 5 years—more than 82% of these nurses identified EBP resources as “more than adequate.”

Understanding of Evidence-Based Practice

The STTI survey results also provide some preliminary indications that nurses' familiarity and application of EBP principles are gaining some foothold:

Much needs to be done to supply critical care nurses with readily accessible information needed to provide optimal care to patients placed in their care.

Profile of respondents in Sigma Theta Tau evidence-based practice survey (N = 565)

RN for more than 15 years	(47%)
Baccalaureate degree in nursing	(37%)
Work as staff nurse	(65%)
Work in hospital setting	(60%)

- 31% of RNs characterized themselves as having a high level of familiarity with EBP and 45% described their familiarity as moderate;
- 45% of participants reported that they had a high level of comfort with the entire EBP process and another 48% identified a moderate level of comfort with this process. Although “comfort” cannot be equated with competency, it likely reflects some degree of both understanding and integration of EBP precepts on a personal level; and
- Aspects of the EBP process in which respondents identified the highest comfort levels was in “Searching for research/evidence.”

Continuing Development in Evidence-Based Practice

Even as a preliminary snapshot of the extent to which EBP is making a meaningful presence in nursing, findings from the STTI survey highlight a number of issues that need to be addressed to maintain expansion of EBP, including the following:

- 24% of RNs characterized themselves as having a low level of familiarity with EBP;
- 10% of RNs rated their comfort level with the EBP process as low;
- RNs identified appraisal and analysis of research evidence as the step in the EBP process that currently poses the greatest challenge;
- 66% of RNs identified the single largest obstacle in locating EBP information was not having the time at work to search for or to analyze research evidence; the second largest obstacle (identified by 45% of RNs) was that evidence was often written in a manner that made it difficult to analyze or appraise;
- more than 1 in 4 (27%) RNs perceived the availability and accessibility of EBP resources to be inadequate; and
- in terms of nurses’ perceived needs for evidence upon which to base their practice, it is particularly disconcerting that 8% of RNs described their need for this type of information as occurring only “seldom” (less than once per month) and another 2% as “never.”

Summary

Much needs to be done to supply critical care nurses with a comprehensive, ongoing, and readily accessible spectrum of information needed to provide optimal care to patients placed in their care. At the very least, we can assist in providing staff with background information

and instructions related to the EBP process; in identifying currently available EBP resources such as those listed at STTI’s Web site (www.nursingknowledge.org, www.nursingsociety.org/education/ceonline.html), in the *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing* journal (www.nursingsociety.org/worldviews), and throughout the Internet; and by designating opportunities for nurses to discuss, locate, analyze, and act upon evidence already available. Unless we take the initiative to instigate such measures, those 8% of nurses who seldom recognize a need to make these efforts may find themselves gradually conjoined to the 2% who never do.

References

1. Sigma Theta Tau International. EBP Study: Summary of Findings. April 2006. Available at: <http://www.nursingknowledge.org/go/study>. Accessed October 3, 2006.
2. Sigma Theta Tau International. Position Statement on Evidence-Based Nursing. Indianapolis, Ind: Sigma Theta Tau International; 2005. Available at: <http://www.nursingsociety.org/research/main.html#ebp>. Accessed October 3, 2006.



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