

NURSING RESEARCH, A PANACEA FOR EFFECTIVE NURSING PRACTICE

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Introduction:

‘Knowledge is power and health system program implementation should not wallow in ignorance in the face of research evidence’ ⁽¹⁾. This statement from the *Federal Republic of Nigeria National Strategic Health Development Plan (National Health Plan) 2010 – 2015* suggests that without research, activities in the health system, where preservation of life is the focus, would be carried out in ignorance. Ignorance we all know is costly and could be fatal. A dynamic profession seeks to meet the dynamic needs of the dynamic society its practitioners serve. Meaningful, effective and efficient changes in professional practice can only be achieved through research.

Nursing is a profession that promotes health, prevents sickness, restores life, and where death is inevitable it assists in ensuring a peaceful transition. It is an art and science, based on a *body of knowledge* that develops the intellectual competencies, attitudes and technical skills of the nurse into abilities which make her help individuals, families and communities sick or well with their health needs. **Research** on the other hand, is a systematic attempt to attend to an ‘irritation’ bothering one’s mind. Research often begins as a result of one problem or situation causing some ‘discomfort’. This is often as a result of the deficit between the ‘ideal’ and ‘reality’. Health research produces new knowledge to improve the health of the people ⁽¹⁾. By implication therefore, nursing research as a scientific process, helps the nurse to understand, describe, predict and provide solutions to problems in her field towards improving the well-being of her clients. It helps to increase knowledge in the area of interest, provide data for evidence- based professional decision-making, and it is useful for pre and post intervention evaluation.

Best Practices, Quality Assurance, and Evidence-Based Nursing (EBN) are global trends towards quality and efficient nursing care. They ensure that clients have the best possible care

at the very first instance, thereby reducing physical, financial, psychological and social costs. These are possible only where there is research, and the findings inform decisions on client care. Research is a critical part of the lifestyle of a professional. Research is fundamental to evidence-based practice (EBP). It improves health care quality, decreases costs, and empowers health professionals. Nursing has advanced beyond the primitive stage to being a professional practice that requires evidence from research to continue to thrive ⁽²⁾. The body of knowledge on which nursing is based must therefore be visited and updated periodically with evidences from quality research. If research is the panacea (solution or the basis) for professional nursing practice as indicated above, then, what are the areas of interests, challenges and the way forward?

Areas of Interest:

Currently, nursing research mainly focuses on a few factors ⁽³⁾. Although, not all nursing problems can be reduced to clear researchable issues, abundant research opportunities exist for nurses in the fields of natural, social, medical and nursing sciences, to guide decision-making in nursing practice. Opportunities / areas for research in nursing education, administration and clinical practice are presented in Figure 1, below.

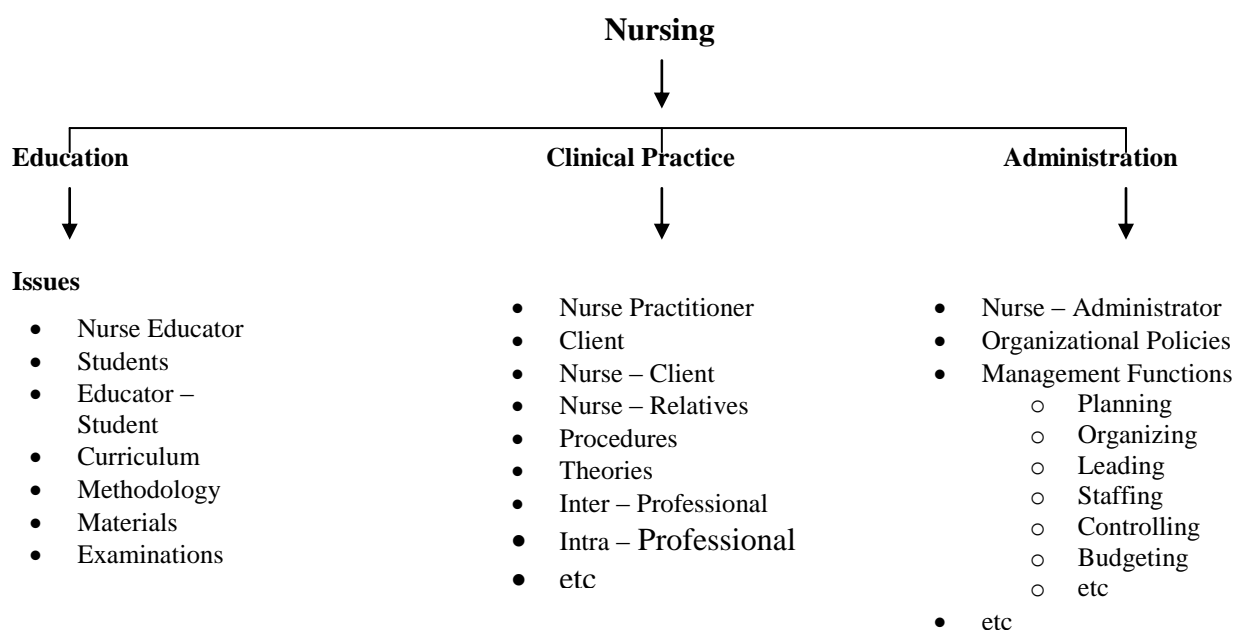


Figure 1: Possible Areas of Research in Nursing

Challenges:

The following factors contribute to the inadequacies in health research in Nigeria and could also apply to nursing research in the country:

- lack of coordination
- lack of regular fora to discuss health research
- poor linkage between research and policy, as well as between international and national research agenda.
- inadequate research priority setting
- dearth of research infrastructure
- sub-optimal capacity building strategies
- ineffectual documentation and publication
- poor adherence to ethical guidelines
- limited monitoring and evaluation of research
- researchers are not adequately motivated
- high attrition rates of potential researchers
- lack of mentorship programmes
- weak enabling environments
- grossly inadequate funding
- poor dissemination of research findings ⁽¹⁾

Highly specialized clinical and research leadership in the nursing profession is inadequate globally, hence the current advocacy for Clinical Nurse Research Consultant to bridge the research-practice gap and promote evidence-based clinical practice ⁽⁴⁾. Phobia for research is not typical to the nursing profession. Many professionals fear research because they lack the knowledge, skills, and / or the commitment required. Other barriers to research in nursing include:

- Belief that the research process is complex and cumbersome
- Time constraints
- Lack of training in information seeking and critical appraisal skills
- Professional ideology that emphasizes practical rather than intellectual knowledge
- A work environment that does not encourage information seeking
- Overwhelming clinical demands
- Lack of interest
- Lack of confidence
- Failure to start / Procrastination
- Lack of funds / limited financial support especially for non-experimental research
- Etc

Incorporating Research Findings into Nursing Practice:

Research findings should be communicated to stakeholders for the work to be worth the resources expended on it and for the findings to be useable ⁽¹⁾. This could be through academic / professional journals and annual scientific sessions or conferences. Getting Research Into Strategies (GRISP) units is being proposed at all levels in addition to biannual Health Research-Policy forums to facilitate utilization of research findings ⁽¹⁾. Incorporation of the knowledge derived from research into practice involves a cumbersome process ⁽³⁾. Literature suggests individual and organizational characteristics are predictors of utilization of research findings or of evidence-based nursing practice ⁽⁵⁾. Such characteristics include: educational status, skills in locating various research sources, support of the organization for searching and reading professional literature ⁽²⁾, support and capability beliefs regarding evidence-based practice skills ⁽⁵⁾, as well as, leadership and the culture in which the leader operates ⁽³⁾. According to Mashlach ⁽²⁾, access to a rich library with current nursing and medical journals and internet were predictors of evidence-based practice.

The Way Forward:

Studies indicate that the professional behaviour of nurses is related to their academic level and preparation ⁽²⁾. Institutional and individual capacity for **quality and relevant** research must be enhanced in terms of ensuring adequate and qualified personnel, and providing financial and other forms of support ⁽¹⁾. Information Communication Technology (ICT) makes research easier. With the push for the adoption of electronic health records in all federal health institutions, nurses in such institutions should not only be able to use them, but they should also be able to utilize them for research purposes. Research friendly environment that encourages nurses to carry out research and utilize research findings more easily, should be created and sustained. The support given by the Federal Government to various

professional associations to publish and sustain publication of their journals is commendable. Nurses must collaborate with government, experts in other fields and health development partners to attain the desired level of nursing research in terms of quality and relevance. Every professional nurse can and should contribute towards growth-directed research in nursing by among other things:

- Maintaining / preserving accurate client records
- Expressing her concerns or “irritations” and asking pertinent “questions”
- Searching for and making sensible use of previous research findings
- Encouraging and supporting unbiased research work
- Being part of a research team
- Conducting simple research

Conclusion:

Everything around us can be looked at more closely to make our work better and ultimately improve the quality of care given to our clients. It is hoped that with the early passage of the National Health Bill and improved allocation of funds to health research ⁽⁶⁾, nurses would participate actively in research activities. My prayer is that this conference will throw more light on nursing research and provoke useful researches whose findings will move nursing education and practice forward in Nigeria and beyond.

Thank you!

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