

## EVIDENCE BASED NURSING IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

*Nursing is an art and science by which people are assisted in learning to care for themselves whenever possible and cared for by others when they are unable to meet their own needs. Nursing has evolved from an unstructured method of caring for the ill to a specific profession. It is therefore imperative that professional nurses imbibe the culture of evidence based practice and bring about changes that will improve the quality of nursing care. This paper briefly highlighted the process and challenges of evidence based practice with a view to educating readers about the subject matter. The challenges among others include, Lack of accessibility of research findings and insufficient new evidence, low level of Education among nurses and Poor organizational support to conduct and use research findings: This article suggested some of the ways these challenges could be addressed and bringing about the development of evidence based practice in nursing in Nigeria. These recommendations among others include; Promoting research mindedness, use of reflective practice, use of critical thinking skills and nursing informatics.*

**Key words:** Evidence based practice, Nursing care, challenges, prospect.

### Introduction.

Nursing like other healthcare team members is seeking to establish itself as a profession therefore concerns are being experienced for development of a scientific base from which members practice. The practice of nursing evolve through tradition, today there are frantic effort to establish a scientific base for practice. There is no gainsaying that although some of the practices in nursing are derived from scientific research, majority of it is from tradition, authority, experience and trial and error as well as logical reasoning. The term evidence based practice is now used as frequently as was the case with nursing process, quality assurance or research based practice. It is worrying, however that often; nurses refer to evidence based practice without demonstrating recognition of its defining features. The public image of the nurse especially in Nigeria has in the last decade been poor. The name nurse depicts wicked, uneducated, doctor's servant, carelessness, inconsiderate, lack of sympathy etc. this poor image stems from multiple factors in which nurses are prominently visible. It has also negatively affected the

quality of patients' care in which nurses are key. These experience among others put the nursing profession in dare need of evidence based practice if the situation is to be salvaged.

Muri-Gray (1997 as cited in Afoi 2010) defined evidence based practice as a clinical discussion method in which the clinician uses the best evidence available in consultation with the patient. Filani and Macilwaine (2002 as cited in afoi, 2010) defined evidence base practice as a method of problem solving that involves identifying a clinical problem, searching the literature, evaluating the research evidence and deciding on the intervention.

Evidence- based nursing practice is the process by which nurses make clinical decisions using the best available research evidence, their clinical expertise and patient's preferences (Stephens 2004). The definition implies that nursing practice is guided by evidence derived from research findings, expert ideas or feedback from clients. The focus is on resolving nursing problems based on accurate analysis of existing information. As a process, it involves the trio of

- i. Identification of facts or scientific evidence.
- ii. Appraising and analysing the evidence in nursing interventions.
- iii. Applying the evidence in nursing interventions.

Evidence-based practice is merging personal clinical expertise with the best available research results according to patient preferences and values (Sackett, 1996). Evidence-based practice (EBP) and nursing research can be directly related but are not one and the same. Nursing research is a scientific investigation of phenomena related to nursing while evidence-based practice is the translation of scientific investigation and other types of knowledge into clinical practice. Evidence based practice therefore aims to apply the best available evidence gained from the scientific method for clinical decisions making. It seeks to assess the strength of the evidence of the risk and benefit of treatment (including lack of treatment) and diagnostic test. Evidence base practice recognizes that many aspect of health are dependent on individual factors such as quality and value of life judgment, which are only partially subject to scientific methods. EBP seeks to classify this parts of medical practice that are in principle subject to scientific method and to apply this method to ensure the best production of outcomes in method treatment, even as debate continues about which outcomes are desirable.

#### History Of EBP

In their history of nursing, Dock and steward (1925 as cited as cited in Afoi 2010) did not mention research or its influence on practice. However strides have been made over the years to establish connections between nursing research and practice. In 1960, Jameson, Sewell, and Gjerston proposed that nursing had been closing the gap between research and practice following the lead of many professions. According to these authors interdisciplinary teams and professional responsibilities were the major foci of nursing; the intent of research utilization was not clearly communicated to staff and advance practice. An additional barrier to the incorporation of research finding into practice was the disagreement between researchers and nursing leaders on the criteria from which studies should be used as scientific evidence for changes in practice. During the 1970s, physician led in the EBP movement and authored numerous books and articles on this topic. This movement occurred after Archie Cochrane, a British epidemiologist, criticized health professionals for their failure to formally evaluate their treatment method. A journal of evidence based medicine, dedicated on advancing practice based on scientific evidence shortly followed. However, it was not until 1998 that nursing published its first Evidence based practice journal. This means that the nursing professions most rapidly accelerate its effort to advance EBP in order to facilitate the highest quality of care and best outcomes for patient and their families Maclntyre, (2005).

#### Steps In Evidence Based Practice

Rosenberg and Donald (1995 as cited in Bennett and Brown, (1999).) conceptualize evidence-based practice as consisting of four (4) stages.

These are:

- Formulating the question
- Searching the literature
- Evaluating the literature
- Implementing the findings.

Within the framework of nursing Fleming (1998 as cited in Afoi, 2010) conceptualized evidence-based nursing as a five-stage process.

1. Information needs from practice are converted into focuses, structured questions.
2. The focused questions are used as a basis for literature searching in order to identify previous findings.
3. The research evidence is critically appraised for validity and generalizability.
4. The best available evidence is used alongside clinical expertise and the patient perspective to plan care.
5. Performance is evaluated through a process of self-reflection audit and peer assessment.

These stages appear to be straight forward but on, closer examination will highlight enormous problems which will be faced by nurses as they interpret and implement evidence-based practice in everyday nursing activities.

#### Benefits Of Evidence-Based Practice

1. Better patient outcomes: there is less variation in care given, where knowledge for improvement is already available. This leads to more predictable outcomes, reduces waste and inefficiency yielding fewer delays in diagnosis and treatment with fewer complications.

2. Helps bridge the research-practice gap.

During the 1980s and 90s, nursing emphasized bridging the research-practice gap through the development of research utilization project. The steps of the process include;

- Dissemination of knowledge.
- Critique of studies
- Application of findings
- Development of research-based practice guidelines.

Even though guidelines and knowledge have been disseminated, the overall effect on clinical practice and patient outcomes is unclear. Nursing research studies are predominantly descriptive or qualitative in design rather than what is considered more rigorous and quantitative. Evidence-based practice is needed to help breach the research-practice gap by:

- Strengthening the evidence-base so that we know what works and what does not work in providing patients with best outcomes.
- Standardizing evidence across fields to reach the best outcome for the patient.
- Housing evidence in online data bases, providing

reviews of the evidence-base.

- Translating and consolidating state of the science into clinical recommendations (Stevens, 2004).

3. Assist practitioners in decision making: nurses and other health professionals daily confirm questions about assessment, treatment and prevention. These all require the best practice guided by evidence to improve client's behaviour, physiologic and psychological parameters.

4. Holds practitioners accountable: clients are becoming more sophisticated in their demand for nursing care base on best practice evidence. There is therefore the requirement to meet their demands if nursing must be accountable to the people served.

5. As health care costs continue to rise, there should be emphasis on providing care based on the best available evidence to reduce cost.

### Challenges

The challenges facing nursing profession in Nigeria can be viewed in the following domains; Educational, Economic, political and socio-environmental challenges (Afoi 2010). The critical health indicators in many African Countries have been alarming, this led to the evolution of many health programs aimed at curbing the spate of these menace. Chief among this is the Professor Olikoye Ransom kuti Primary Health Care. This led to the evolution of Community health Officers (CHO), Community health Extension Workers (CHEW) and later Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). The critical health indicator at best remained stagnant, this was followed by the clarion call for Best Practice (BP) this became a phenomenal emphasis in all fields of endeavour. Then came the ugly face of acute shortage of resources, poor health care financing and the political will to do so, mass exodus of health care professionals to other countries, leading to a very wide nurse to patients ratio, poor continues Education for health care workers. The low level of Education among nurses compounded the situation. This made Best Practice limited to teaching hospitals. Health indicators continued to worsen especially in the rural areas. Today so many manuals, Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs), etc have evolved. These were developed using the principles of evidence based practice and took into consideration resource poor settings, accessibility, affordability and sustainability. The harsh reality of the acute shortage of nurses in our health care facilities has made the need for evidence based practice inevitable. Afoi & Emmanuel (2009) in a study in Kaduna state recommended that the nursing process form should be adapted rather than adopted to make its implementation feasible. This followed the complains of nurse practitioners that they have too many patients such that filling the preliminary pages (Assessment) is time consuming.

As it relates to research utilization and evidence-based practice, the centre for disease control, CDC (2000 as cited in Afoi, 2010), identified 5 basic areas required in building capacity for evidence-based practice. In this assertion, the areas involved include:

- Structures
- Processes
- Management systems
- Human, physical and knowledge resources
- Logistics needed to transform available resources into positive capacity utilization.

In a more practical term, Restas(2000 as cited in Ojo, 2010) identified several challenges which could be grouped under 4 domains as follows;

i. Lack of accessibility of research findings and insufficient new evidence in the relevant areas of practice:

- Insufficient research in the relevant areas of practice
- Attitude of researchers conducting research only to fulfil academic requirement.
- Poor awareness of relevant areas of research
- Inadequate knowledge of research methods
- Lack of confidence in conducting and presenting research reports.
- Inadequate skills needed to access and critically analyse research findings.
- Inadequate ability to understand research articles
- Lack of feedback and evaluation of interventions from the practice areas.
- Too few nurse researchers
- Poor documentation of new information

ii. Poor organizational support to conduct and use research findings:

- Lack of demand for research by policy makers and nurse practitioners.
- No provisions of time to conduct research.
- Poor facilitation on the use of research findings in nursing practice
- Lack of authority on the part of the nurses to effect change emanating from research endeavours.
- Limited funding including lack of computers and internet facilities for conducting research and dissemination of research results

iii. Poor support from significant persons in the health sector

- Lack of cooperation at local, state and national levels
- Poor attitude towards implementation and utilization of nursing research and evidence-based practice.

iv. Fear of anticipated outcome in using research findings.

Thus in relating evidence to practice, the aforementioned barriers or challenges should be identified so that appropriate strategies could be used to address them based on prevailing environmental conditions. There is a psychological resistance to the new research ideology. Evidence abounds in literature to support this. The argument is that nurse's individualized psychological barriers are obstructing the development of a research culture. Hicks (1997 as cited in Akpabio, 2009) offer an alternative and complementary explanation for the lack confidence in nurses. To him the main problem lies in gender



stereotype. According to him since nursing is numerically and historically dominated by women, nurses may not feel or believe that they are adequately prepared educationally and psychologically for the academic rigors of research.

Organizational and structural issues are undoubtedly significant inhibitors to nurses' involvement in research. The chronic shortages of nurses for instance is already militating against evidence based nursing Practice. The exodus of nurses to other countries in search of better Job opportunities is no longer news. Lack of understanding regarding the difference between research utilization and EBP may be a contributing factor to the slow progression of evidence based nursing care. There may be communication difficulties among nursing leaders to their subordinates about the processes involved in evidence based nursing practice. Poor/ lack of nurses' skills in consuming research. There may no willingness of organizations to find research and make potentially costly practice changes based on the best evidence. Lack of time and appropriate skill may also act as barriers to evidence-based practice.

Evidence- based nursing practice may lead to "cookbook nursing" and a disregard for individualized patient care.

#### Way forward

The following strategies are recommended for enhancing evidence based Nursing Practice in Nigeria.

#### Use of reflective practice

Reflection has been conceptualized in various ways by different authors but all authors agree that the initial stage of reflection commences with the awareness of an uncomfortable feeling due to the realization that knowledge being applied during the practice is insufficient to explain what happened.

#### Promoting research mindedness

Nursing research as an identifiable and separate discipline has a relatively short history in Nigeria. This point was proven in Olaide (1993 as cited in Afoi, 2010) survey of nursing research in Nigeria. The study showed a scanty evidence of research-mindedness among Nigerian nurses. Perhaps this is traceable to the educational preparation where nursing students are actively discouraged from questioning "the facts" and are not taught to argue logically or to substantiate their argument. The way forward in this context is for schools of nursing to foster a spirit of critical enquiry of research-mindedness right from the outset of training. This will involve not only the teaching of research methodology to students but also the active incorporation of research findings into all lectures and teaching encounters.

#### Use of critical thinking skills

Development of critical thinking skill of interpreting analyses, evaluation, inference, explanation, self regulation is particularly important considering the types of decisions made in practice, the complexity of client needs, and the amount of information the nurse face in care delivery. Further more research is needed on teaching strategies for promoting critical thinking skill. The curriculum of schools of nursing must emphasize the development of critical thinking skills and independent decision-

making.

#### Nursing informatics

This will help build connection with sister institutions, and gradually build up a web of communication and interactions and sharing of ideas about practice. The task of nursing informatics is to study the structuring and processing of nursing information to enhance clinical decision-making.

A patent danger of evidence- based nursing is that it may lead to "cookbook nursing" This fear could be allayed if nurses' balance, their clinical expertise with the risk and benefit of treatments of each patient in such a way that individuality of each patient is assured.

#### Conclusion

Evidence Based Nursing Practice is key in the management of clients/patients, its full implementation and institutionalization will depend on the attitude of nurses towards it, the health system and improved clinical postgraduate nursing programs. A professional practice model which contains the four components of professional nursing i.e clinical practice, administration, education and research will be the climax of a tangible step towards redeeming the dignity of the Nurse in Nigeria.

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