

Editorial



Paul Fulbrook, joint editor



Lynne Harrison, joint editor

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT – THE WAY FORWARD

In *CONNECT* issue 1(4), our editorial challenged traditional approaches to evidence-based practice and highlighted the importance for practitioners to consider all forms of knowledge. However, gathering the evidence is only half the picture. The complementary half relates to the way in which knowledge is used in practice. The way forward, which embraces *practice* knowledge generation and *practice* knowledge application is a process known as practice development. This involves: new ways of working which lead to measurable improvement in care; making changes which occur as a response to a specific client need or problem; and making changes which lead to effective nursing care. In this way, practice can be developed not only through the use of research findings, but also from the use of knowledge developed, for example, through reflective enquiry and audit.

Practice development is a continuous process, which is patient-focused and involves good teamwork. It starts with a clinical problem or issue, and has many parallels to clinical problem-solving models. Initially, the problem is analysed in detail. This information is then processed in relation to the full range of evidence (embracing all types of knowledge) in order to make sense of the situation. Next, a change strategy is developed, which is then tested in the practice setting. Later, both the process and the outcomes are critically evaluated. If necessary, another circle of practice development is undertaken in the light of the evaluation. In this way, the process of practice development is similar to that of action research.

This does not mean that research knowledge is second best; practitioners need research to give them pragmatic solutions to practice problems. 'Doing' and 'using' research should be accorded equal standing, and there are several ways that nurses can undertake research in a practice setting. However, while nursing has arguably concentrated primarily on equipping nurses to become proficient users of research, rather than to become researchers, practice development should support all nurses to both 'do' and 'use' research.

The purpose of practice development is to develop a specific context; thus its outcomes are not generalisable. What is essential is that all types of knowledge, not just research knowledge, required to inform a particular development are considered equally. The way forward is complex, and will require a transformation from 'traditional' evidence-based practice to a new way of thinking and practising, which embraces all types of knowledge. This raises many other issues beyond the scope of this editorial. However, by focusing nursing on practice development, where the importance of knowledge is its translation into meaning for the care of patients, nursing knowledge will acquire a pragmatic value. All kinds of knowledge should be considered equal in the abstract, but will assume different levels of importance in relation to the particular context. In this way, critical care nursing is no different to any other field of nursing. However, the 'bottom line' is that its outcome benefits patients.

Paul Fulbrook and Lynne Harrison

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