

Strategies for Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in an Undergraduate Nursing Clinical Course

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Background & Aims

- The Institute of Medicine and major health care agencies in the United States have described the need for nurses to provide evidence-based care to improve the quality of health care.
- Nursing faculty play a critical role in educating students to engage in evidence-based practice (EBP).
- It has not been well-explicated in the literature how to *incorporate* EBP in clinical teaching, and further, how to *evaluate* the strategies employed.
- The aims of this study were to describe ways in which EBP was incorporated into clinical assignments, and to present findings regarding the efficacy of these assignments.

Methods

- This descriptive mixed-methods study was conducted during a one semester (two 6-week sessions) mental health clinical nursing course in Fall 2014 and included 64 students.
- Four faculty members were responsible for teaching two 6-week sessions, with eight students in each group.
- Eight written assignments were designed to incorporate EBP:
 - Six reflective journals
 - One process recording
 - A therapeutic group plan and evaluation paper
- Using descriptive statistics, these papers were analyzed to determine the number and type of references used.
- Content analysis of the final reflective journal was performed to uncover themes related to students' engagement in EBP.

Results

- In both six week sessions, the number of students citing journal articles increased steadily each week, and by week five, 100% of students documented a minimum of one journal article in their reflections.
- Sixty-two percent of students used at least one article in their process recordings, and 90.6% did so in their group plan and evaluation papers.

Frequency of Students Using Evidence-Based Literature in Their Written Reflections

	Reflection 1	Reflection 2	Reflection 3	Reflection 4	Reflection 5
First Half-Term (n = 32)					
Cited at least 1 article	53.2% (n = 17)	68.8% (n = 22)	71.9% (n = 23)	81.3% (n = 26)	100% (n = 32)
Cited only textbook	18.8% (n = 6)	18.8% (n = 6)	28.1% (n = 9)	12.5% (n = 4)	0% (n = 0)
Second Half-Term (n=32)					
Cited at least 1 article	96.9% (n = 31)	96.9% (n = 31)	96.9% (n = 31)	90.6% (n = 29)	100% (n = 32)
Cited only textbook	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	6.3% (n = 2)	0% (n = 0)
Term total of students citing at least 1 article (N = 64)	75% (n = 48)	82.8% (n = 53)	84.4% (n = 54)	85.9% (n = 55)	100% (n = 64)

- Content analysis of the final reflection papers revealed four themes related to the use of EBP:
 - 1) Incentivized (Graded) Clinical Assignments Provided Motivation
 - "Throughout the semester, I have spent many occasions researching and analyzing evidence-based nursing practice. Often the prompt for doing so was to complete assignments."
 - 2) Assignments Promoted Exploration of Resources, Learning, and Fostered Development of a Professional Self-Concept
 - Students noted that the EBP assignments enhanced their self-confidence, capability, and gave them a sense of feeling more accomplished, knowing they were providing the most appropriate care for their patients.
 - 3) Specific Applications to Mental Health Nursing
 - Students indicated that evidence-based literature assisted them in addressing personal biases and stigma about mental illness.
 - 4) Barriers and Future Use
 - Students noted that locating and reviewing literature was time-consuming, and that using EBP in the care of emotionally ill clients was more challenging than doing so for medically ill clients, the former requiring individual approaches.

Conclusions

- When documentation of EBP (as measured by incorporation of recent, high quality journal articles in written student assignments) is specifically required by faculty members, with expectations clearly described in narrative in the course syllabus, and grading rubrics provided, the majority of students demonstrated use of EBP.
- Students' ability to use high quality evidence in their written work improved as they were exposed to more theoretical content during the course of the term, and as they received specific feedback from their clinical faculty members.

Limitations

- This study employed a convenience sample of students which was relatively homogenous with respect to age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and it drew from clinical nursing classes at only one large public, Midwestern university, which could limit generalizability to other groups.
- The sample size of 64 was modest.
- Clinical faculty members taught only eight students during each 6-week session, so findings might not be generalizable to classes with greater numbers of students.

Recommendations

- Introduce EBP and its importance to students in their freshman year of study.
- Require use of EBP in all clinical courses throughout the students' tenure in school, such that they develop skills in locating evidence and applying it to their practice.