The Research Active Clinical Nurse: Against all Odds

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Objectives

At the end of this presentation the participant will be able to:

1. Identify trigger events associated with research activity
2. Discuss characteristics of the research active clinical nurse
3. Explain the impact sustaining and supporting influences on research productivity

Research-Active Nurses

o **Academic Nurse**

- Research is a role expectation in many academic settings and is important for academic advancement
- Nurses in an academic setting usually have advanced education and access to a variety of research resources
- However, not all academic nurses are research-active due to conflicts with teaching obligations or difficulty accessing a specific patient population

o **Clinical Nurse**

- Clinicians have access to a variety of patient populations but may lack the education and resources needed to be research-active
- In addition conflicts with direct care obligations, staff education, and/or leadership oversight impact their ability to devote time to research activities

Against all Odds

- In spite of potential or actual limitations and barriers to the conduct of research in the clinical setting, some nurses are research-active

Previous Research

- Few studies examine research productivity of nursing faculty (Studies were primarily conducted between 1974 and 1988)

- No studies examine research activity by hospital-based clinical nurses

- Factors that impact research-activity by the hospital-based clinical nurse are unknown

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theoretical understanding of factors that affect nurses decisions to initiate and participate in nursing research projects and strategies that facilitate successful conduct of nursing research projects by hospital-based clinical nurses

Specific Aim

- **The specific aim for this study provides answers to the following questions:**

1. What influences a clinical nurses decisions to become research-active?
2. Why are some nurses reach-active and others are not
3. What sustains and supports research-activity by hospital based clinical nurses

Definition

- A research-active clinical nurse is a nurse who spends at least 50% of his/her time with patients or their families and has been the Principal Investigator on at least one IRB approved nursing research study

Setting & Sample

- **Setting** a healthcare system in the Midwest consisting of a primary urban facility, 8 community hospitals, and 12 regional medical practices

- **Sample** (N = 26) research-active clinical nurses from a database maintained by the Office of Nursing Research & Innovation for the healthcare system

- **Demographics**
  - Female
  - Age 27-61 (mean = 50)
  - Advanced degree 65%
  - Clinical Nurse Specialists 42%

Analysis

- Digitally recorded semi-structured interviews
  - Transcription
  - Active review of the digital audio files
- Memo notes recorded during and after each interview
- Interviews reviewed separately by two researchers, then together to achieve consensus

Findings

Constant comparative analysis resulted in the following themes

1. Education affects research activity
2. A triggering event or condition precipitates research
3. There are essential research-active nurse characteristics
4. A sustaining and supporting environment is critical

Education

Nursing education did not prepare me to be research-active

"When I graduated I had no idea nurses could or should conduct research…I thought that was reserved for the PhD"

"I wish someone had prepared me in school…I guess they [educators] did not think it was important for me to know"

"No one told me nurses could conduct research, I thought it was for someone better educated than me…then I saw other nurses conducting research and I thought, why not me"

Triggering Event or Condition

Identification of a need that no one else was going to address

"There was little or no research published about the problems we were encountering in practice, so we had to develop our own evidence to help solve these problems…There is still a lot unknown"

"I saw problems in the clinical area and I just wanted (needed) to know why"

"What is surprising is that you think, that is not an original idea, surly others have questioned this …then you go to the library and find that there are no studies on the topic"

Research-Active Nurse Characteristics

Curiosity, ownership and self-confidence

"Knowing that I can either ignore the issue or do something about it (research)…that drives me to do the research…I don't want to guess, I want to know"

"Get over the idea that you have to be right all of the time…it is exciting to learn the world does not work like you thought it did"

Sustaining or Supporting Factors

- **Support from individuals within the environment and time to pursue their study**

- "I had support from my manager, but also from a research mentor…without both it would not have been possible"

- "I really did not know what I was doing, but this person (CNS, Teacher, NM, mentor) was there to help…This person made research seem exciting…I was hooked"

- "My research was possible because I was in a position where I had the time and freedom to decide what projects are important to pursue"

Model

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Research Active Clinical Nurse
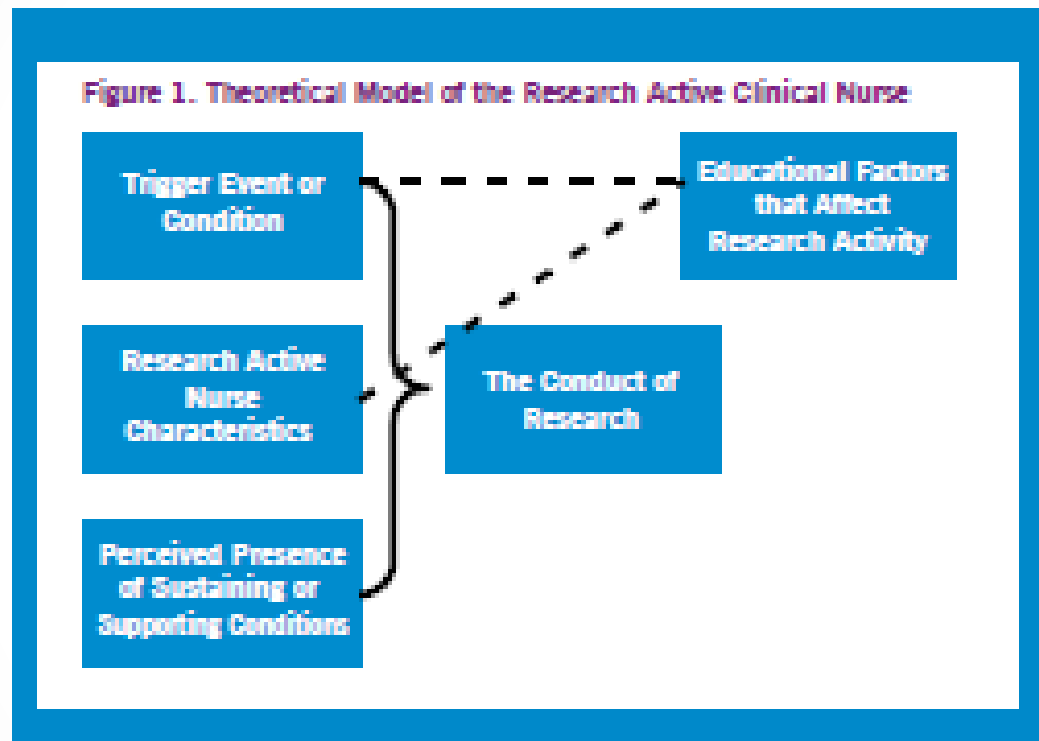
Education affects both nurse characteristics and feelings about a triggering event
All three conditions on the left are essential for the conduct of research

Recommendations

Rethink the notion that only the PhD can do research

Provide experiential research course work at all levels that will promote research activity, get students excited about research and their role in the development of new knowledge

Encourage nurses to be curious about their practice; teach them to ask "why"

Help nurses identify a need (a question in need of an answer), and take ownership of filling that need. "If not me then who?"

Recommendations

Provide a supporting and sustaining environment

Environmental (organizational) support and resources are important but not sufficient to promote research activity, unless it includes access to research mentors to help the nurse plan, design, and conduct studies

Provide Role Models

Since many nurses were inspired by someone else, the more nurses conducting research are visible to other nurses, the more likely it is that these nurses will also say; "If she/he can do it, why not me?"

Questions?