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The Impact of Structured Research Curriculum in Undergraduate Nursing Programs

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Across the country, undergraduate students are increasingly getting first-hand independent research experience in the bachelor's degree curriculum. Many schools have established programs for students to become involved in the scientific research community as early as their freshman year (Eagan, et al, 2013). These programs give students a chance to learn about inquiry design and approach, execution, and writing. This allows students to understand their place in the discovery and implementation process (Beckham, Simmons, Stovall, Farre, 2015). Most of these programs have been established for students of the natural sciences, but there are less opportunities for nursing students. Although nursing and the natural sciences are not identical, they are inherently connected. The practice of nursing is the ability to apply scientific knowledge and research to real-life clinical situations.

There is a distinct lack of dedicated undergraduate BSN curriculum for research-based courses in public universities around the country. While many schools have honors programs that offer independent nursing research opportunities to their students, honors programs represent only a small fraction of the undergraduate nursing student population. Out of 16 public schools surveyed in Texas, only 10 had a required research course for undergraduate BSN students. Around other regions of the country, the picture was similar. Out of 22 degree plans analyzed from schools in regions of the country such as the West Coast, East Coast, and South, only 17 had required research courses.

Although many BSN nursing programs are lacking dedicated research content, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing lists "scholarship for evidence-based practice" as the third essential in their list (AACN, 2008). This document delineates how professional nursing practice involves the process of identifying problems, interpreting and implementing evidence based practices to solve the problem, and evaluation of effectiveness of the implemented practices. It stands to reason that taking more focused nursing research courses would boost a nurse's ability to complete this process in their clinical careers. Since evidence-based practice is derived from research studies, it is important that a nurse is able to understand underlying research methods and analysis when reading or hearing about new evidence-based practice that may be of interest to them.

Several studies shows that understanding and implementing evidence-based practice is a fundamental element of being an effective medical professional (Mackey, Bassendowski, 2016). Unfortunately, multiple studies have revealed that many nurses are intimidated by the research behind evidence-based practice. Many nurses state that they are unsure how to interpret statistical jargon and incorporate findings into their own patient care, as well as how they perceive scholarly articles to be too complex to appreciate (Rojjanasritat, Rice, 2017). Many are turned off by a lack of comprehension in the research process, and an inability to see results and determine their significance and validity (Keib, Cailor, Kiersma, Chen, 2017).

There are a limited number of studies that have shown improvements in nurses' attitudes towards evidence-based practice after completing a research course. One such study concluded in 2017 that research is "an effective way to improve students confidence and perceptions of EBP" in undergraduate nursing students (Keib et al, 2017). Another determined that research in BSN degree educational settings provides for better theoretical practical applications of research findings (Ayoola, Adams, Kamp, Zandee, Feenstra, Doornsbos, 2016).

There is not enough literature to determine whether a push for more dedication to independent nursing research projects in undergraduate BSN programs could lead to better outcomes at the bedside. Further evidence would need to be collected to determine the answer these three fundamental research questions: Does there need to be a nationwide emphasis on implementing nursing research curriculum in undergraduate baccalaureate programs? Do nursing students who complete independent research courses demonstrate better clinical outcomes than students who do not have these programs? Do nursing research courses required in undergraduate baccalaureate programs include independent research education or only introduction to existing nursing research? Analyzing data specific to these research questions could be valuable in improving attitudes towards evidence-based practice after graduation.

Title:

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

Does a lack of dedicated research curriculum in undergraduate baccalaureate nursing programs parallel with nurses' attitudes toward implementing evidence based practice? The purpose of this project is to determine the relationship between research in undergraduate curriculums and the comprehension and use of the research process in nursing practice.

Content Outline:

Introduction:

1. Many universities in the United States have undergraduate research programs for students in a variety of majors in order to better understand research process and implementation, but there are less opportunities for nursing students than these other programs.
2. Nursing is considered an applied science, therefore more research opportunities should be implemented into baccalaureate nursing programs (BSN) so that they can later be applied to clinical practice.

Body

1. Main Point #1: The American Association of Colleges of Nursing lists "scholarship for evidence based practice" as the third essential in their list (2008).
 1. Supporting Point #1: Understanding the research behind evidence-based practice will increase nurses' ability to identify problems in the clinical setting and use critical thinking to effectively implement sound nursing practice.
2. Main Point #2: Studies show that many nurses are intimidated by the research behind evidence-based practice.
 1. Supporting Point #1: Nurses state that they are unable to interpret the data that are in these research studies, and feel pressured when trying to understand science behind the results.
3. Main Point #3: Not all public universities with nursing students have introductory research courses as part of their curriculum.
 1. Supporting Point #1: 10 out of 16 public Texas schools had research courses implemented into their curriculum. In regions throughout the rest of the United States, the results were similar with 17 out of 22 have introductory research courses.

Conclusion:

1. There is not enough literature to determine whether a push for more dedication to independent nursing research projects in undergraduate BSN programs could lead to better outcomes at the bedside, including better critical thinking to lessen clinical mistakes. Analyzing data specific to these research questions could be valuable in improving attitudes towards evidence based practice after graduation.

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Author Summary: Claire is a junior nursing student working with Dr. Leigh Goldstein on a research project to emphasize the important role that research has when integrated into nursing curriculum and how that plays into evidence-based practice.

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