The impact of structured research curriculum in undergraduate nursing programs

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Background

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[1]. 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[2]. 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.

Objective

The purpose of this project is to determine the relationship between independent research opportunities for undergraduate nursing students and how those opportunities increases confidence and comprehension in evidence-based practice once these students have received their BSN and enter their clinical practice.

Evidence-Based Practice

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) lists "scholarship for evidence based practice" as the third essential in their list (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.

Results

Figure 1. Flow model of undergraduate nursing curriculum outcomes.

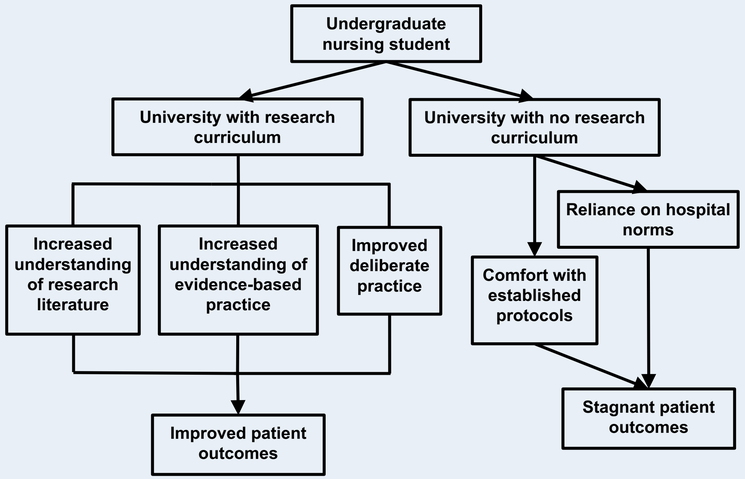

Figure 2. University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing's undergraduate nursing curriculum.

Junior 1st Semester (13 hrs)

N356 Mental Health Nursing Across Lifespan	_____
N256P Problems in Mental Health Nur Practicum	_____
N325 Adult Health Nursing I	_____
N325P Adult Health Nursing I Practicum *ℝII	_____
N264 Nursing Research	_____

Junior 2nd Semester (15 hrs)

N265 Nursing Care of Childbearing Families	_____
N365P Nur Care of Childbearing Families Prac	_____
N255C Adult Health IIA	_____
N157P Clinical Nursing Skills II Practicum	_____
N223 Genetics in Health Care	_____
N273 Quality & Safety for Nursing Practice *ℝWr	_____
PHM338 Pharmacology **	_____

Senior 1st Semester (15 hrs)

N266 Nursing Care of Children & Families	_____
N366P Nur Care of Children & Families Prac	_____
N255D Adult Health IIB	_____
N355P Adult Health II Practicum*ℝII	_____
N354 Spanish for Health Care Professionals *ℝCD	_____
N250 Interprofessional Collaborative Practice	_____

Senior 2nd Semester (14 hrs)

N275 Public Health Nursing	_____
N375P Public Health Nursing Prac*ℝWr	_____
N274 Complex Nursing Care	_____
N377 Leadership & Management of Nur Care	_____
N277P Clinical Care Management Practicum	_____
N279P Capstone Preceptorship	_____

Research Curriculum

One such study concluded in 2017 that research is "an effective way to improve students confidence and perceptions of EBP" in undergraduate nursing students[3]. Another determined that research in BSN degree educational settings provides for better theoretical practical applications of research findings[4]. 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.

Research Questions

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?

Conclusion

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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References:

1. Eagan, et al, 2013
2. Beckham et al, 2015
3. Keib et al, 2017
4. Ayoola et al, 2016

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