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 year1. 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 process2. 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.

- Increased understanding of evidence-based practice
- Increased understanding of research literature
- Improved deliberate practice
- Comfort with established protocols
- Reliance on hospital norms
- Improved patient outcomes
- Stagnant patient outcomes

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

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 students3. Another determined that research in BSN degree educational settings provides for better theoretical practical applications of research findings4. 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.