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An Integrated Approach to Evidence Based Practice

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Summary of project

Research and research findings are often seen to be of little relevance to nurses working in the clinical area (Burrows and McLeish, 1995). Nurses are also often criticised for not having the skills to carry out evidence based practice (EBP) (English, 1994). This report outlines a project carried out in an acute NHS Trust, which aimed to overcome these problems, by creating an Evidence Based Council and a network of associated Journal Clubs.

Background literature

Demonstrating clinical and cost effectiveness is a key goal for the NHS (DoH, 1995; DoH, 1997), and one means of achieving this is evidence based practice (EBP). This involves the practitioner identifying the problem, asking a research question, searching the research literature, and then implementing changes on the basis of the evidence available (White, 1997). The overall purpose of EBP is to provide effective health care within the limited resources available (Colyer and Kamath, 1999). Although EBP allows nurses the chance to measure "their unique contribution to patient health gain" (French 1995), many difficulties in engaging nurses in research and EBP have been documented. The following

have been offered as explanations for this:

- Research findings are seen to be of little relevance to nurses working in clinical areas (Burrows and McLeish, 1995; English, 1994)
- Nurses lack confidence in their knowledge and skills related to research (Pearcey, 1995; English, 1994)
- Heavy clinical workloads (Upton, 1999)
- The nursing profession has been slow to grasp the full implications and opportunities that the EBP agenda has wrought (Bonell, 1999)

Kitson, Harvey and McCormack (1998) argue that EBP should be implemented in a structured fashion, and suggest that successful implementation of research in practice is a function of the relation between the nature of the evidence, its context and the mechanism through which change is facilitated. Further requirements include an organisational infrastructure to co-ordinate and direct the process (Closs and Cheater, 1994). Nurses do however seem to have a positive attitude towards the concept of EBP, even if they are unable to commit the energy or mobilise the skills necessary to overcome the major barriers. The literature indicates that nurses appreciate the need for, and potential benefits of, research and EBP (Upton, 1999; McSherry, 1997). The project described here aimed to harness these positive attitudes and enable nurses to feel some ownership of EBP.

Background to the development of the project

The idea for the project resulted from a discussion between the authors and a charge nurse, who worked in the same acute Trust, whilst attending a research conference. It was felt that there was a distinct lack of presentations at the conference that were directly applicable to clinically active nurses. Out of the discussion a solution began to emerge, and an outline project proposal was developed to promote an integrated approach to EBP across the Trust. The project proposal was presented at a series of open seminars, and the

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responses were overwhelmingly positive. After gaining endorsement from the Nursing Executive, funding was sought to help implement the project.

The project was initially established in the Northern General Hospital NHS Trust (NGH). It was one of two acute NHS Trusts in Sheffield, the second being Central Sheffield University Hospitals Trust (CSUH). The two Trusts have since merged to become Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. CSUH had already established an Evidence Based Council through a shared governance mechanism. They fully supported and helped in the project.

Project aim

To create an integrated approach to Evidence Based Practice across the Trust, involving the creation of an Evidence Based Council and a network of associated directorate-based Journal Clubs. The specific objectives were:

- To support the process of literature searching, critical appraisal and research application
- To disseminate relevant findings across the hospital
- To generate clinically relevant research questions

Establishment of the Evidence Based Council

The remit of the Council was to increase the profile of evidence based nursing within the hospital and to co-ordinate the local journal clubs. By creating a forum for discussion for ward-based nurses, the Council aimed to enable nurses to compare and discuss relevant issues across department and directorate boundaries. In addition, it would allow networking of existing evidence and help to generate priorities for future research activity that could be adopted by the Trust.

A part-time facilitator supported the Council. Whilst the Trust agreed that Council members were allowed time off to attend the meetings and for education and training, it was left to individual departments and council members how this was to be implemented. A decision was taken early in the consultation process that the Council should be multi-professional. The majority felt that the initiative should be inclusive and not restricted to nurses only. However, unexpected resistance to integration was encountered from a minority of nurses. Most AHPs were interested in the project and asked to be kept informed of Council work, but rarely attended. The Dietician and Occupational Therapy representative attended regularly. Their contribution was invaluable.

A number of members were "co-opted" from key departments which support EBP. These included:

- University of Sheffield Health Sciences Librarian
- Member of the Trust Practice Development Support Team
- Clinical Effectiveness and Audit Department representative
- Education and Training Department representative

Final membership of the Council was sixteen nurses, five AHPs and six co-opted representatives.

Initially the project team acted as officers for the Council. After the first three months, a Chair was appointed from the Council membership. This post has rotated every six months. The Council has met once a month since its first meeting in October 2000. Attendance has been varied and has ranged from twenty-eight to eight.

A major concern of Council members regarding EBP was access to Information Technology, and this was discussed the Trust's IT department. Roll-out of the NHSnet is now underway.

The Council was keen to identify clinical issues of concern that might prompt the development of new research and audit. A considerable amount of time was spent discussing issues related to nutrition. The Council produced a discussion document which was widely disseminated across the Trust, and which highlighted existing local evidence, examples of good practice and ongoing areas of concern. Work has started on the development of a research proposal to explore factors influencing malnutrition in hospital.

Establishment of the Journal Clubs

Journal clubs provide a way of making a clear link between practice and research (le May, 1999; Koziol-McLain and Tanabe, 1996; Kirchoff and Beck, 1995) and are a way of enhancing research awareness (McSherry, 1997). They can improve participants' ability to critique research and make changes in practice based on evidence (Koziol-McLain and Tanabe, 1996). A journal club can allow nurses to view such change as non-threatening and positive (Kettles, 1997).

A network of journal clubs was established to allow two-way communication between the Council and clinically-based nurses. Membership was based on open access and included ward-based staff from each area. A

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condition of association with the Evidence Based Council was that Council members were allocated time within the Journal Clubs to disseminate information about Council activity. This also allowed the opportunity for issues that had been identified within the Journal Clubs to be fed back to the Council for further discussions and action. Creating this dialogue between both forums allowed ward-based research issues to be discussed at a hospital-wide level.

A mapping exercise was performed to identify any existing journal clubs and practice development groups across the Trust. Some areas had well established journal clubs, or the equivalent. Others had none, or the clubs had, over time, failed to thrive. The Council helped to reinvigorate existing groups and establish new groups with the help of the Council facilitator. Success was very mixed, however, the ideal of two-way communication between the Council and Journal Clubs has been realised.

Education and training Issues

The Council members decided to use the "Evidence Based Health Care" open learning package developed by NHSE Anglia and Oxford to search and appraise the literature related to an issue of concern in their clinical area, and to generate an action plan.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the Evidence Based Council was devised, and integrated with a larger Trust-wide Evidence Based Practice study co-ordinated by Professor Gerrish. A number of key issues relating to the successful implementation of such a project were highlighted during the course of the project and the evaluation process.

1. Organisational Endorsement

The principle and aims of the Council were endorsed by the Trust and included in its nursing strategy. In reality, however, many Council members had problems negotiating time to attend the meetings and educational programme.

2. Membership

Recruitment of clinically active staff proved difficult. Membership was predominantly made up of Clinical Nurse Educators and Nurse Specialists. A reason for this may be that these groups have the necessary autonomy and flexibility to allow them to attend meetings.

3. Multi-disciplinary Involvement

Whilst the Council was established to be inclusive of AHPs, residual resistance to collaboration and multi-disciplinary working still exists amongst some nurses. Some AHPs have consistently attended the Council and proved to be valuable contributors to work undertaken.

4. Education and Training

The education and training offered to Council members was highly valued. Participants reported that the training was particularly useful because it was skills-based and was of practical help in their EBP work.

5. Journal Clubs

Establishing Journal Clubs which are attractive and accessible to staff has been an ongoing challenge for the Council members. A flexible definition for the Journal Club was adopted. Many directorates found that meetings which had a practice development, rather than a critical appraisal emphasis, proved more popular.

6. Facilitation

The success of the Council over the last eighteen months was due in large part to the work of the facilitator. The project leaders and council members have had to balance Council work with that of their substantive posts. The facilitator was the only person who had one day of protected time to work on Council business.

Recommendations

- The successful creation of an Evidence Based Council is dependent upon ownership by clinical staff, but for the initiative to survive, support from the organisation is essential. This needs to be more than just notional endorsement and should include releasing staff from the clinical area to attend meetings, projects and training.
- Ongoing support for the Council should be included in Trust strategies and targets for EBP.
- Council members need a role description and this should be included in their Individual Performance Review.
- Clinical priorities should be central to EBP.
- Funding for education in EBP is essential so that all members have baseline skills.
- Journal clubs can be difficult to establish and maintain, but a facilitator with protected time can make this easier.

Conclusions

In summary, the project outlined in this short report has made a clear contribution to the clinical governance and EBP targets within the local Trust. Despite the successes, the experience of this initiative has highlighted a number of concerns which others involved in the promotion of EBP would be advised to consider. On a more positive note, much has been achieved with limited funding. Whilst there is still a long way to go, the project has made significant headway in achieving the initial objectives.

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Further Reading

A copy of the full report is can be downloaded from the website – <http://www.fons.org/projects/integrate.htm>

Palfreyman, S.J., Tod, A.M. and Doyle, J. (2003) Learning from experience: Promoting evidence based practice in a large teaching hospital. *Practice Development in Health Care*. Vol.2. No. 2. pp 87 – 98.

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