The purpose of this column is to reflect on how we might encourage nurses to use research literature in practice and to engage in research when the opportunity presents itself. There are many published recommendations in the research utilization literature for increasing research utilization among staff nurses and clinical nurse specialists (e.g., Hundleby, Milne, Leighton-Beck, Graham, & Fitzmaurice, 2000; Kajermo, Nordström, Krusebrant, & Björvell, 2000; Mackay, 1998; Omery & Williams, 1999). In this column, I will explore why we need to rethink the way we introduce students to the utilization and conduct of nursing research.

Research utilization involves at least two components, according to Estabrooks (1999a): instrumental utilization and conceptual utilization. Instrumental utilization involves “concrete application of the research, and the research is normally translated into a …useable form, such as a protocol” (p. 204). Conceptual utilization, on the other hand, involves the use of research to change one’s thinking about clinical practice. These components tend to be discussed as a single entity in much of the research utilization literature. Their use in practice, however, requires different levels of expertise and time commitment. These differences need to be reflected in our teaching of introductory research methods to nursing students.

I argue that a reasonable expectation of all nurses in clinical practice is the conceptual utilization of research literature. The conceptual utilization of research literature requires reflective and critical thinking skills, as well as a positive attitude toward research. Research courses in undergraduate nursing programs can contribute significantly to the development of these skills and attitudes in nursing students.

Instrumental research utilization, on the other hand, involves a lengthy and complicated process (see for example, Mackay, 1998; Rosswurm & Larrabee, 1999) and requires expertise in research methods, statistical analysis, and change management. Conducting instrumental research utilization projects may be a reasonable expectation of clinical nurse specialists (although Mackay, 1998, argues “not necessarily”), but is likely beyond the capacity and mandate of staff nurses. I suspect that when staff nurses claim a lack of expertise in research methods as the reason why they do not use the research literature in their practice (Pearcey, 1995), they are thinking of instrumental utilization. It is no wonder that they feel a lack of expertise!

Given the mandate of introductory nursing research courses to help students become intelligent consumers of the research literature, it seems to me that we need to reflect on the research utilization skills and attitudes which will be required of our students when they engage in clinical nursing practice. I argue that our graduates need excellent conceptual utilization skills and a positive attitude towards research. Valuing nursing research is a particularly important outcome of introductory research courses, since a positive attitude towards research predicts the use of the research literature in clinical practice (Champion & Leach, 1989; Estabrooks, 1999b).

Much of the research utilization literature focuses on how to get nurses to engage in research and research application. Our aim is to increase awareness and comfort with research and to demonstrate that research can be user-friendly.

**CANO is on the web!!!**

In search of CANO’s web pages? Here’s how to find us:
- go to the Canadian Oncology Society’s (COS) website, found at www.cos.ca
- when the COS home page appears, click on the number 5 in lower portion of left-hand side of screen; this will take you to the next screen
- on the left-hand side of the new screen, click on “Affiliated Societies”
- members of COS will appear. Scroll down until you find CANO
- click on CANO’s name
- you will arrive at CANO’s home page where the philosophy, mission, and goals and objectives are easily viewed
- CANO’s home page also allows you to obtain a membership form and/or obtain access to CANO’s secure web pages
- if you want to obtain a membership form or learn more about membership benefits, click on “Membership Application and Benefits”
- to access CANO’s secure web pages, click on “CANO members”
- follow directions to obtain your password
- once you have your password, your journey through CANO’s web pages will begin!!

Have fun learning more about CANO! Don’t forget - your comments are important to us. Please let us know how we are doing by e-mailing the web pages working group at r3kchapman@health.nb.ca.
students to watch expert nurses and then utilise and conduct of nursing research. Critics to introduce students to the difficult, so why bother? (Mackay, 1998) research utilization among staff nurses, and then revise our teaching methods. I invite nursing educators to reflect on what is needed and on how we might achieve it. Armed with the skills needed to utilize nursing research at a conceptual level and a positive attitude toward nursing research, our graduates may be more likely to use the research literature to reflect on their practice. When they are ready to move into graduate studies, they may then be ready to learn the more difficult skills needed for instrumental research utilization. The ability to critique published studies is a crucial component of instrumental research utilization, and such an assignment would be justified at a graduate level research methods course.

The purpose of this column is to urge nursing educators to reflect on how we teach introductory research methods courses to undergraduate nursing students. We need to examine the expectations of our graduates as a result of the research methods course and to make certain that the foci of the course are consistent with those expectations. I argue that staff nurses need to be competent conceptual users of research and that we need to change our research methods courses to assist them in acquiring the necessary skills and attitude.

Priscilla K. Koop, RN, PhD is an associate professor at the University of Alberta and a nurse scientist at the Cross Cancer Institute. Her mailing address is: Third Floor, Clinical Sciences Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2G3, e-mail: priscilla.koop@ualberta.ca.

References


