Key Steps for Evidence-Based Nursing Practice (EBNP)

This is a Brief Online Learning Tutorial (or BOLT) brought to you by the LISTEN project, a HRSA funded project focusing on improving the information literacy competencies of nursing students and professional nurses.
Evidence-based nursing practice (or EBNP) is necessary for all clinical settings and practice areas. You know that your practice should be based on evidence but you begin to wonder if it is. This tutorial gives you a brief introduction to the key steps for EBNP and may help you facilitate and integrate evidence into your practice.
EBP involves the integration of evaluating the relevance of the evidence, searching the evidence, and appraising the evidence for a specific clinical question. This process also involves the nurses clinical knowledge and the patient’s choices and values. (Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt, 2005)

“What is Evidence-Based Nursing Practice (EBNP)?

“Evidence based-practice is a problem solving approach to practice that involves the conscientious use of current best evidence in making decisions about patient care…”

Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt, 2005, p.587
The delivery of safe, effective nursing care requires the use of an evidenced–based approach to practice, which requires adequate access to and the ability to synthesize information.
There are 5 key steps to EBNP. It begins with asking a question, then search for the best and current evidence to answer the question, appraise the evidence obtained from the search process, integrate the information found from the search, and the last step is to evaluate the outcomes of the evidence-based intervention. These steps will be detailed in this tutorial.
Step 1: Ask the question

P I C O

P - Patient/problem
I - Intervention under consideration
C - Comparison intervention-alternative intervention
O - Outcome to achieve

In EBNP, step 1 is to ask a clinical question. The PICO approach will guide you in formulating a searchable question. What is PICO? P- stands for the patient, population or problem of concern. I stands for the present intervention under consideration. C stands for the comparison intervention or alternate intervention you are considering for the clinical situation. And finally the O, stands for the outcome. What is the outcome you hope to achieve? P-I-C-O
Where do you search for the best evidence to answer a clinical question? PubMed/ Medline’ clinical queries can help find systematic reviews and meta-analysis. PubMed’s Clinical Category and search filters to quickly locate relevant literature on etiology, diagnosis, therapy, prognosis, and clinical prevention guides.

If you are looking for specific nursing evidence, the CINAHL database provides Evidence-based Care Sheet and Clinical Queries filters to help you locate the information. The Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (or AHRQ) provides the clinical guideline database freely accessed on-line.

While these are examples of EBNP resources, there are multiple sources of evidence available, the task is to determine what is the most applicable to the clinical situation you are addressing.
Step 3. Appraise evidence

✓ What were the results of the study?
✓ Are the results valid?
✓ Will the results facilitate patient care?
✓ Were the subjects similar to your patient?


The 3rd step in EBNP process is to critically appraise the evidence found from the literature. Asking yourself these questions can help you ensure relevance and transferability of the evidence from the search to your specific patient.
The question has been determined, the resources accessed and the evidence obtained... Now, What will you do with it?

We need to integrate the evidence into nursing practice. First, determine if the evidence has taken into consideration the patient’s unique characteristics such as sex, age, and disease process, etc.... when integrating the evidence always include your clinical assessment and experience. Then determine the risks, benefits and appropriateness for the patient’s clinical situation.
Finally, it is imperative to evaluate the outcomes. If you integrated the evidence personally or with a pilot project, what were the outcomes? Were they the desired or predicted outcomes? Did the integration achieve the initial desired outcome? Were the results reliable and valid? Most importantly...will this help improve the care of your patient?
So let’s review, there are 5 key steps to EBNP. It begins with asking a question, then search for the best evidence to answer the question, appraise the evidence obtained from the search process, integrate the information found from the search, and the last step is to evaluate the outcomes of the evidence-based intervention.
Continue to visit the LISTEN website, at listenuphealth.org, for more helpful tips on using technology and seeking, evaluating, and applying information in nursing to support evidence-based nursing practice.
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