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.
You have found several articles that will help you answer your clinical question. A very important aspect of evidence-based nursing practice is the ability to choose the appropriate type of evidence depending on the clinical question. How do you know the quality of the evidence is appropriate for your clinical question? This BOLT highlights information about levels of evidence.
The pyramid being used in this tutorial uses 7 levels of evidence. They are placed in the symbol of a pyramid to show how the Levels are ranked from strongest to weakest. Level I is the highest the most rigorous and considered the strongest evidence for certain interventions. Level VII is the least rigorous and in comparison to Level I the weakest. This is only in terms of specific clinical questions and situations.

The ranking of different types of evidence and different types of studies helps nurses determine the strength and quality of the evidence. The levels of evidence indicate the strength of the information resources. Depending on the clinical question - the level of evidence will help you determine what is the appropriate research design needed to support the intervention or treatment.

For clinical interventions and treatments the First level of evidence, the systematic reviews of randomized clinical trials or the evidence-based clinical guidelines are the best sources.

A clinical example would be: determining the various types of positioning to reduce Ventilator associated Pneumonia, the first type of research we would search are the Level I studies such as the systematic reviews of randomized clinical trials. Also if there are evidence based –practice guidelines based on these types of studies, along with up to date guidelines from a reputable source, then these should be considered first as guidelines for a clinical intervention.
What if the clinical question focuses on the coping mechanisms of caregivers or symptom management for the chronically ill then qualitative studies within Level VI would offer the best and most appropriate evidence.

Although Level VII, is not the strongest or rigorous, this does not mean that it does not provide valuable information, and may be very helpful depending on the clinical question or situation. Often, the articles based on the opinions of experts may serve as a guide to finding the newest research or guidelines on a topic.

Each clinical question and scenario will guide the choice of the best evidence and the appropriate study for the strongest level of evidence.
The ability to incorporate evidence-based care into nursing practice requires an understanding of the best evidence and the level of evidence required for a clinical situation. The rating system discussed, Levels I to Level VII, represent a range from strong (or rigorous) to weak evidence. The pyramid system simply serves as a visual guide for rating the type of study and strength of the evidence, and is used to help understanding of the system used to integrate the best evidence into nursing practice.
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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