

Happenings

Ontario Health Care Evaluation Network: Building Partnerships and Promoting Evidence-Based Practice

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In recent years nurses have been included on committees formed to plan changes in health-care delivery and hospital restructuring, taken up advanced-practice roles such as nurse clinician or nurse practitioner, and become involved in the trend toward community care (Ciliska et al., 1996; Kitson, Ahmed, Harvey, Seers, & Thompson, 1996; Landesman, 1996; Nicklin & Dunn, 1995; Sharratt & Hiscott, 1995; Shaw, 1995; Verderber & Urden, 1994).

Despite these gains, there is a clear need for nurses to further expand their roles and empower the profession by documenting changes in nursing practice. While health-care reform may be perceived as upheaval, it can also provide nursing professionals with unique situations in which to conduct research. Opportunities will exist to plan and implement new programs or procedures and to evaluate their effect on health-care delivery, to make further recommendations, and to disseminate findings to other health-care professionals, including health-care policy-makers.

Inherent in all of this activity is the need for information. Information, or knowledge, can be obtained from two sources: evidence-based resources and other health-care professionals. Evidence-based resources refers to the research literature that is collected, interpreted, and integrated in the decision-making process (McKibbin,

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Wilczynski, Hayward, Walker-Dilks, & Haynes, 1996). Collaboration with other health-care professionals allows for the sharing of knowledge, experience, and resources, thereby improving the quality of patient care.

The Ontario Health Care Evaluation Network (OHCEN) has developed a database for health-care professionals, which promotes collaborative research and facilitates retrieval of evidence-based resources. This database, the OHCEN Inventory, is available on the Internet and is therefore increasingly accessible in even geographically remote areas. Searchable by keyword or subject index, the OHCEN Inventory features a simple, point-and-click interface and presents information in the form of collapsible, hierarchical trees. Alternative means of access have been developed so that any Internet browser can extract information from the OHCEN Inventory.

The benefits of collaboration between the faculty of university schools of nursing and hospital or community nurses have been noted by several nursing research groups (Ciliska et al., 1996; Verderber & Urden, 1994). Doctorally prepared nursing faculty are able to provide consultation for design and implementation of research studies, access to research subjects, and guidance in the preparation of manuscripts and grant applications. The uptake of nursing research into practice is also promoted by partnerships between these groups (Kitson et al., 1996).

Hospital and community nurses in Ontario can use the OHCEN Inventory to communicate with potential collaborators. The OHCEN Inventory facilitates the partnering process by providing contact information for government departments, funding agencies, professional organizations such as Ontario and Canadian nursing associations, academic institutions such as faculties of nursing across Canada, hospitals, public-health units, district health councils, and research institutes. Whenever possible, descriptions of expertise and research are included, as well as hypertext links to e-mail and Internet sites.

Traditionally, evidence has been obtained through literature searches in bibliographic databases such as MEDLINE and CINAHL. It is often difficult to obtain good evidence because of inadequate indexing for relatively recent concepts such as restructuring, time restraints, discrepancy between published results, and the sheer volume of health-care literature (Haynes, Hayward, & Lomas, 1996). However, information tools have been developed to help health-care professionals find and interpret the evidence. The Internet is also becoming an important source of health-care information, including nursing resources, because

of its widespread availability and reduced publishing costs (Hersh, 1996; Rogers, 1995; Tomaiuolo, 1995).

In support of evidence-based decision-making the OHCEN Inventory offers access to citations, abstracts, and full-text documents. It also acts as a springboard to other databases containing evidence-based tools, many of which are Internet resources. These databases use the same Internet publishing system as the OHCEN Inventory and therefore have the same easy-to-use interface. The OHCEN Inventory and related inventories point to only those resources that are considered to be the best evidence-based tools, thereby saving health-care professionals sorting through the vast array of Internet information.

Related inventories include the Evidence Based Medicine Project (EBM), the Guidelines Appraisal Project (GAP), and the Public Health Effectiveness Project (PHEffect). The EBM Inventory links to electronic journals on the Internet, Internet search tools, and subject indexes to Internet health-care resources. It also provides access to a series of full-text documents entitled *Users' Guides to the Medical Literature*, which help health-care professionals find, interpret, and use research articles. The GAP Inventory points to clinical practice guidelines, which are organized by condition, by discipline, and by producing agency.

The PHEffect Inventory consists of full-text systematic overviews related to public-health nursing as well as a searchable database of public-health nursing intervention studies. At the time of writing, this inventory also contains 80 bibliographies for frequently searched topics including Evidence Based Practice, Health Care Utilization, Infant Health, Adolescent Health, Heart Health, Parenting, Cancer Prevention, Community Based, Tobacco Use, and Women's Health.

The Province Wide Nursing Project is another initiative that will result in an inventory of information published on the Internet. This is a joint effort of Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses, their professional organizations and labour unions, the Ontario Ministry of Health, and academic and regulatory bodies, with the goal of creating centres of excellence to demonstrate cost-effective improvement in patient outcomes through use of the best knowledge, skills, and technologies in nursing (personal communication).

The OHCEN Inventory and related databases assist all health-care professionals with their research activities by pointing to quality evidence-based resources and by contributing to the body of evidence-based information on the Internet. The PHEffect Inventory and the upcoming Province Wide Nursing Project Inventory will prove to be

especially useful to nursing professionals. Furthermore, there is currently no single resource, in either print or electronic format, that provides contact information and descriptions for such a comprehensive list of health-related organizations in Ontario as the OHCEN Inventory. It is expected that health-care professionals, once they become familiar with the inventories, will return to them frequently.

Online Resources

OHCEN Homepage

<http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/ohcen/default.htm>

PHEffect Homepage

<http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/ohcen/groups/hthu/pheffect.htm>

EBM Homepage

<http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/ebm/default.htm>

GAP Homepage

<http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/cpg/default.htm>

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