A Real-World Experience to Engage Students in Evidence-Based Practice

This article describes how one college of nursing effectively engages students in evidence-based practice (EBP). Throughout the baccalaureate curriculum, students are expected to apply evidence to practice. However, faculty and senior student evaluations revealed students needed help solidifying their learning and preparing them to be leaders using evidence in practice.

Previously, the EBP project was a “dummy project,” that is, students asked and answered the questions. Why not get clinical questions from practicing nurses? Final-semester nursing students, in consultation with faculty, would find evidence to help answer those questions. They could present their findings in professional podium and poster presentations at an annual EBP symposium hosted by the college of nursing. The EBP symposium truly could be a real-world experience. Armed with this thought, faculty reshaped the project.

The Strategy

- Area agencies submit “burning” questions. Practicing nurses may serve as clinical consultants and attend student team meetings as well as the symposium.
- Students attend a seminar where faculty review the EBP process and sources of evidence. The librarian provides guidance in the computer laboratory, as students gain hands-on experience conducting an online literature search.
- Teams of four to five students select a clinical question from the burning question list and search for evidence in multiple databases. The team critically appraises systematic reviews and practice guidelines, and individual students appraise relevant research articles.
- Faculty hold three to four consultations with student teams. Faculty guide the team in constructing the question in PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome) format. Faculty review the materials submitted by students and assist the team in looking at the evidence and discussing any recommended changes in practice. Faculty serve as consultants in the team’s development of a PowerPoint® and poster presentation, and grade the podium and poster presentations at the symposium using a grading rubric.
- The team writes an abstract and prepares a literature review and references in matrix format. These materials form a proceedings booklet shared with attendees. Teams develop a PowerPoint presentation, select a speaker, and design a poster for the symposium.
- The symposium is advertised via a brochure. Area hospitals provide funding and support for the free symposium, which includes printing materials, lunch, and continuing education units. Sponsors advertise in the booklet and man a recruitment table. All attendees receive a copy of the booklet, and following the event, posters are displayed in area hospitals.

The Outcome

The overwhelming reaction from students is enthusiastic. Comments from RN-to-baccalaureate nursing degree students included: “This was the most valuable project in the program; I am already using the skills I’ve learned to help other nurses on the unit find evidence in answer to our ‘burning’ questions,” and “It rejuvenated me to look at what we do in practice.” Comments from traditional students were: “I learned how important research is and how to critique research reports,” and “It was exciting to do a presentation on a practical topic of interest to the area hospitals.”

Practicing nurses’ responses included: “I took away several new ideas from the students’ presentations that would improve our nursing practice at our hospital,” and “I have attended the symposium for several years and it’s always impressive. My hospital submits questions for consideration, and we take the findings and the proceedings booklet back to our staff.”

In summary, using evidence to answer burning questions straight from the clinical settings is an effective way to engage students and staff nurses in EBP.

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