

# Practical Research Methods For Educators: Becoming An Evidence-based Practitioner

## Evidence Based Practice

A review of how research is used in clinical practice to improve patient outcomes, treatment decisions, and the therapeutic relationships with clients.

Evidence-based practice has gained increasing popularity since its introduction and is the accepted standards of practice, policy, management and education within health services across the world (Ryan et al., 2006). Health care professionals are encouraged to use current research in their practice to deliver the highest quality of care, achieve optimal outcomes, promote cost-effective client care and ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making (CNA, 2002; Janier et al., 2011).

One of the earliest examples of research informed practice was documented in 1859 by Florence Nightingale in her book titled, *'Notes on Nursing: What it is, and what it is not'*. Through systematic collection and analysis of data, she identified factors that contributed to the high morbidity and mortality rates of British soldiers during the Crimean war (Schmidt & Brown, 2012). Even though Nightingale was an innovator in nursing research, it was another 40 years before nursing research reemerged as relevant to nursing practice (Schmidt & Brown).

Evidence-based practice in its most current definition is the use of the best scientific evidence, integrated with clinical experience and incorporating patient values and preferences in the practice of professional care (Houser, 2012). The concept of 'evidence based practice' is credited to a British medical researcher and epidemiologist by the name of Archie Cochrane (1909-1988). In 1972, Archie published a book titled, *'Effectiveness and Efficiency: Random Reflections on Health Services'* in which he illustrated that health care was not based on scientific evidence that identified ideal practice (Nieswiadomy, 2012). Archie emphasized the importance of using evidence from randomized controlled trial (RCTs), also called randomized clinical trials, which was considered the gold standard that can be used as a basis for practice decisions (Nieswiadomy). Archie Cochrane was ahead of his time. Even though his book was published in 1972, it took 20 years for the concepts within to be generally accepted by the medical community.

Evidence-based practice is a process involving the examination and application of research findings or other reliable evidence that has been integrated with scientific theories (Schmidt & Brown, 2012). Evidence-based practice involves the use of reliable, explicit and judicious evidence to make decisions about the care of individual patients, combining the results of well-designed research, clinical expertise, client concerns and client preferences (Holleman et al., 2006). For health care professionals to participate in this process, they must use their critical thinking skills to review, appraise and evaluate research publications and other sources of information to determine which are valid and applicable to practice (Schmidt & Brown). Furthermore, health care professionals must take into account the quality of evidence, assessing the degree to which it meets the four principles of feasibility, appropriateness, meaningfulness, and effectiveness (Doody & Doody, 2011). As illustrated in Figure 1, the triad of rigorous evidence, clinical

Information and Evaluation Services February, 2012 [mireille.lecharrois@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:mireille.lecharrois@albertahealthservices.ca) 1

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