THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCH NURSE

Frederick Ndiawo, RN.

Introduction and background

Clinical research is research that seeks to determine effectiveness of medical procedures, investigations and medicines used for humans. According to Margaret Bevans et al, Clinical research is a broad endeavor that involves investigators from a wide range of disciplines working with human subjects to characterize health and illness, and invent, test and evaluate treatments (Margaret Bevans, 2011). Clinical research nursing is a specialty nursing practice focused on the care of research subjects and implementation of clinical research (Margaret Bevans, 2011). Most hospitals in Kenya have recently adopted evidence-based practice. The same applies to most countries worldwide. The only way of basing practice on evidence is through research, which would most likely be clinical research. In this regard, clinical research is mandatory in all institutions if they are to realize evidence based practice.

Research process

According to the Association Of American Medical Colleges (AAMC, 2001), The research process involves 5 phases which includes, conceptual phase, construction of research design, empiric phase, analytic phase and disseminating phase. The conceptual phase is the first phase
where content and structure of research are created. The research nurse formulates research problems and questions, searches, reviews literature, develops a framework, and develops hypothesis for future research. Phase of construction of research design involves general plan preparation of real research. The research nurse identifies variables, comes up with operational definitions and selection of design for data analysis. Empiric phase involves implementation of all plans that were made. It also involves sorting out scientific results and evaluating them. Analytic phase is the stage where the research nurse synthesizes the research data, classifying it in characteristics or features. He/she looks for correlations in the research data and compares this data with data from similar researches. Disseminative phase is the last phase which involves presentation and publishing of results. The research nurse uses research results in clinical practice, presents results in conferences, lectures or publishes in journals.

**How nurses contribute to clinical research**

Clinical research is vital for finding new treatments and improving patient care. Research nurses are patients’ advocates, ensuring that patients are protected and supported throughout the research. The Research nurse utilizes skill including management, teaching and mentoring, communication and information sharing. Working with other researchers and the multidisciplinary team is crucial for successful research. The position of research nurses is often complex because of a combination of contractual and accountability arrangements. This position can be intensified by feelings of isolation, a lack of professional support and limited specific educational opportunities. (Gordon Hill, 2006).
Support needed to enable greater involvement for nurses in clinical research

The research nurse needs to have necessary knowledge and skills to support her role. He/she has to be knowledgeable in that speciality which is also necessary, as she will be the link person between other disciplines. To enable greater involvement for nurses in clinical research there needs to be a clear career pathway for nurses to develop and enhance education and skills necessary for this speciality. Research nurses needs professional support by for example professional associations so that knowledge will be increased through education in this field. Institutions can also encourage and make clinical research part of a clinical nurse’s role. In doing so, it would be more effective for a research nurse to apply research data in clinical setting. Thus, research can be translated from theory into practice.

Summary

Margaret Bevans (2011) found out that nurses who work with study participants in a clinical research setting, regardless of the specific role, perform activities that do indeed represent the practices proposed in the clinical research-nursing domain of practice. In reference to a poster abstract that I co presented titled, Legislation Shaped by an Emergency: Methanol Poisoning Experience at Kenyatta National Hospital, Kenya (A.W. Akidaa, 2011), published in the British medical journal, the triage nurse identified the methanol poisoning after a second patient presented with blindness. We were able to administer ethanol and this was after we had had previous case presentations and had even developed a protocol of managing methanol poisoning.
This had been a problem in my country Kenya and despite the police raids, the problem would recur. While trying to identify the reasons we found out that methanol was easily and cheaply available and unregulated. Other than this, local brews were unregulated and because of frequent raids, methanol was an easy option because it would make the brews ready in hours contrary to the normal time taken to brew which is about 7 days. One of our recommendations was to legalize the local brews, regulate, and control them. Local brews were legalized through the Alcoholic Drinks Control Act 2010 for quality control. We were able to be a link as nurses between government ministries and with other stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and various groups in the community. Experienced research nurses are often highly skilled in terms of their specialist clinical knowledge, and have a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the research process, including methodological, ethical and practical issues. (Gordon Hill, 2006). It has been clearly illustrated that the research nurse is involved in the entire research process.

References


