THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCH NURSE

Introduction

Research is globally recognized as an imperative to the health of the population. It is defined by Grove, Burns and Gray (2013) as a systematic inquiry to validate and refine existing knowledge and generate new knowledge. In the health care field, research remains fundamental to provide evidence-based guidelines for safe and effective health care (Pick et al. 2011). In the nursing profession, research is a major force that is used to change the practice, education and health policy (Grove, Burns & Gray, 2013). Research is further necessary to develop the knowledge base to inform nursing policy and practice (Moule & Goodman, 2013).

The current Nurses’ Competition 2015 on discussing the role of the research nurse organized by Global Research Nurses Network will contribute to the increased awareness on roles and responsibilities of nurses and their contribution in different research projects. In this article, the role of the research nurses and skills that nurses contribute to clinical research, along with my skills contributed to research projects I have worked on will be described. It will specifically be seen from the Rwandan nurse perspective working for a higher learning institution in charge of education and research activities within the domain of Nursing.

Nurses’ research roles, skills and responsibilities to contribute to clinical research

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) (2014) emphasised that nursing research encompasses a wide scope of scientific inquiry including clinical research, health systems and outcomes research, and nursing research education. According to the same authors, clinical research is a research based on biological, behavioural, and other types of investigations, provides the scientific basis for the care of individuals across the life span and occurs in any setting where nursing care is provided. Gibbs and Lowton (2012) stressed that clinical nursing research combines the more familiar nursing responsibilities of holistic patient care with the world of clinical research protocols, governance and management. This is supported by AACN (2014) stating that nurses bring a holistic perspective to studying individuals, families, and communities involving a biobehavioural, interdisciplinary and translational approach to science. Furthermore, National Institute of Health and Clinical Center (NIHCC) (2010) added that clinical research nursing includes care provided to research participants, activities to support protocol implementation, data collection and human subject protection. Whilst clinical trials according to Bowrey and Thompson (2014),
aim to determine the effectiveness of new treatments in clinical practice, involve a rigorous multidisciplinary process of study design, data collection, analysis and publication. They continued that clinical trials include most common types of clinical trial, such as clinical trials of investigational medicinal products or those that do not use medicinal products, questionnaires or surveys and etc.

Additionally, clinical research nurses help to develop new drugs treatment regimens or care pathways for patients, through studies (Gordon, 2008). Hence, my contribution as a nurse to research are described in this article.

I am a registered mental health nurse from Rwanda, working for University of Rwanda (UR) in the school of Nursing and Midwifery as a lecturer. With my little experience in research; I have contributed to a limited body of knowledge in mental health nursing domain for my country either as a principle investigator/co-investigator or as supervisor of students’ research projects, and as a research assistant/team leader. I have accomplished my undergraduate studies in Mental Health Nursing at Kigali Health Institute currently known as College of Medicine and Health Sciences/UR. To fulfil the requirements of the course, students at the end of the programme had to conduct a mini-dissertation and this was my first exposure to research. My research project was entitled “Maltraitance et ses repercussions sur la santé mentale de l’enfant” (maltreatment and its consequences on child’s mental health). The consequences of the genocide, the death of family members and the disruption of family stability increased the risk factors of child abuse. This study has shed light on the experiences of child victims of abuse and at the end of my studies I was appointed as Head of the Unit of children and adolescents at the largest psychiatric hospital of Rwanda.

I continued my studies (honours degree) at University of KwaZulu Natal/ South Africa, and then at the end of cycle, I conducted a study called “A survey of paediatric admission at the Ndera Neuropsychiatric Hospital of Rwanda”. This study resulted in the improvement of health care provided to children with mental health needs at that hospital. Lastly, I conducted a study on the “Assessment of Common Perinatal Mental Disorders in a selected district hospital of the Eastern Province in Rwanda” to fulfil the requirements of Master of Nursing (Advanced Psychiatric Nursing) at the University of the Western Cape/South Africa. From this little journey in research, I cannot call myself as a research nurse or clinical research nurse because I had not been appointed as such but I have gained much interest in research. With my previous research, I am invited to present in an International Congress of Women’s Health Issues to be held in Cape Town South Africa. I
have been also invited to join an international and interdisciplinary research team as a co-investigator to undertake a broader project entitled “A community-based intervention to address perinatal depression in Rwanda”. This study is expected to a) ameliorate the wellbeing of women, their children and husband by lessening perinatal depression, b) to increase knowledge and improve clinical practice of new graduates nurses with an additional unit related to maternal and child mental health in their curriculum, c) to improve maternal and child mental health care in Rwanda, d) to improve the nursing research capacity.

The National Institute of Health Clinical Center (NIHCC) (2011) highlights that clinical research nurses are integral members of the interdisciplinary clinical research team, and they participate actively in protocol development, implementation, clinical care, and research outcomes dissemination. As a result, a research nurse can give her/his contribution to the research team throughout the process of the study. With my previous study, findings and recommendations formulated were shared with the team of the current study and these yielded some clarifications about the problem. I have also participated in protocol development and will continue with its implementation and dissemination of findings. So, all nurses with any experience about a problem of concern in any area where s/he has some expertise can contribute to the clarification of a research question, design, protocol implementation, dissemination of findings.

Clinical research as involving humans is strictly regulated to ensure participants’ safety and wellbeing (Pick et al. 2011) and nurses involved in clinical research have main responsibilities as an advocate, resource for the research participants and protocol coordinator (Moule & Goodman, 2013). Hadley (2014) further added that most important role of the research nurse is to ensure that participant safety is maintained at every stage of the clinical trial process. This had guided me in my previous studies and will continually lead me to ensuring safety and advocating for research participants for the undergoing study. I will further continue to balance the individual clinical needs of research participants and protocol requirements, and clearly communicate with my team.

In addition, I was selected to be a research team leader in a national survey which was involving genocide survivors with unhealed wounds, physical impairment and mental health needs. I used my usual responsibilities of ensuring safety and providing holistic care to patients, leadership and management skills to lead my team. I had shared with the team some communication skills and other important information, thus it helped us to smoothly
approach participants and obtain their informed consent and all of these facilitated data collection, and reporting. In line with this, Gibbs and Lowton (2012) have stated that clinical nursing research combines the more familiar nursing responsibilities of holistic patient care with the world of clinical research protocols, governance and management.

**Conclusion**

Looking back on my background I can state that my career in mental health nursing has been always directed by different research projects carried out which resulted in influencing the nursing practice within psychiatric services in Rwanda, and curriculum of nursing students and serve as data to advocate for mental health care.

Nursing research is essential for the development of new knowledge and practice. Therefore, nurses involved in clinical research may make unique contribution to the lives of individuals in present and future, families and communities. This discussion helped me to gain insight about the role of the research nurse, specifically in clinical research. As a result, knowledge gained while writing this article will improve my contribution to undergoing and future research projects.

**References**


