Champions of CHANGE

Nurses at UCLA Medical Center Promote Quality Patient Care Through Evidence-Based Practice

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Nurses at UCLA Medical Center are promoting quality patient care and improved nursing practice through an evidence-based practice fellowship program

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

Cover Story • By Anna Gawlinski, DNSc, RN

To develop research-based nursing practice and foster the professional development of staff nurses, the nursing department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) designed a staff nurse evidence-based practice fellowship program. This program assists staff nurses to solve clinical practice problems while applying evidence-based knowledge to promote quality patient care. The program blends staff nurses’ clinical knowledge with research utilization and the change process.

Description of Program

The program is a 6-month, evidence-based practice mentored program whereby staff nurses identify a clinical practice issue that is solved by applying the latest evidence and research into practice. Staff nurse fellows are mentored through a process of steps that include:
• finding the latest evidence and research by searching the literature to help solve their practice issue;
• critiquing and synthesizing the evidence;
• developing an evidence-based practice document that describes the new practice change;
• implementing the new evidence-based practice; and
• evaluating the outcomes of the practice change.

Once the project and evaluation is completed, fellows disseminate the project to division and departmental committees and councils.

During the 6-month period of the program, a fellow is mentored by the director of nurse evidence-based practice, a doctorally prepared researcher and clinician, and a clinical nurse specialist with clinical expertise in the fellow’s area of practice. The program consists of six, 8-hour classes (one class per month), which provide both theory and practical information needed to facilitate completion of the fellow’s project.

Fellows increase skills in finding the literature via library Medline searches, learn to critique and synthesize research, prepare educational sessions to share information at staff meetings and other educational forums, disseminate the new practice change and learn how to measure the outcomes of their project and change in practice. Results are disseminated both internally and externally via conferences and other educational forums.

Staff Selection

The selection of staff nurses for the fellowship is via a competitive application process. Applications from the three institutions that comprise UCLA Healthcare, representing diverse clinical inpatient and outpatient areas, are desired. Criterion used in the competitive review process is:
• a minimum of 1 year of nursing experience;
• at least 1-year tenure on the current clinical area;
• employed ≥ 50 percent;
• interest in learning about use of research and other evidence in practice;
• a partnership between staff nurse fellow, the unit director and a clinical nurse specialist;
• an identified clinical mentor who has knowledge and skill to mentor the fellow through her evidence-based practice project;
• leadership skills—informal leader among peers; and
• ability to meet or exceed clinical performance.

Applications are evaluated and scored by the members of the Nursing Practice Research Council. For example most recently, 14 applications were submitted and seven staff nurses were chosen for the fellowship program.

Support From Administration

To facilitate participation of the staff nurse fellows with their unit teams, funding is provided from the mandatory education cost center. Funding covers the estimated expenses for each staff nurse fellow to receive the equivalent of 1 day per month (8 hours at regular, not overtime pay) of time to allow for participation in the evidence-based practice didactic lecture series. Additional work on their project can be requested in 4-hour blocks of time, not to exceed 12 hours per month.

The director of evidence-based practice coordinates the fellowship projects and works with staff and their respective clinical nurse spe-
IMPROVING PATIENT CARE: Fellow Sarah B. Lopez, BSN, RN, (left) reviews her evidence-based practice project with Cynthia Pearson, BSN, RN, and Nancy Tiller, MBA, RN, who are also in the fellowship program.
cialist mentors to assist in all phases of their project, from "fine tuning" the clinical practice issue to evaluating the evidence-based change in practice. Support from the Department of Nursing Research and Education provides educational materials, poster supplies, and secretarial assistance. The clinical nurse specialist provides additional support for the fellowship program by working with the staff nurse to improve patient care through the incorporation of research into nursing practice. Clinical nurse specialists mentor the fellows who work in similar specialties. They provide expert clinical advice and assist the fellows to comply with appropriate communication channels in implementing a research-based practice change. The director of evidence-based practice functions as a consultant to the fellow-clinical nurse specialist dyad, evaluating research utilization methodology and development of policies, procedures, and standards of care that are evidence-based and related to their projects.

Unit directors (nurse managers) provide two types of support to the fellowship program that ensure its success. The first type of support is financial. The unit manager provides the fellow release time from direct patient care for 8 hours each month. This salary support provides work time for the fellow to attend classes on research utilization and to complete the activities required by the program.

Secondly, unit directors provide support through the creation of an environment that encourages learning and innovation. The manager validates the worth of the fellow's activities, provides the fellow opportunities to share activities with the staff and facilitates time to work on her project based on agreed-upon goals.

**Multiple Benefits**

The benefits of the staff program are many and extend from the individual staff nurse, to enhancing the knowledge and practice of all unit nurses and improving patient outcomes. When asked about the effect of the fellowship program, the nurses described how the fellowship was incorporated into the unit's quality care program and simulated professional growth.

"We are using my fellowship project as our performance improvement project for the year," said Janna Bullock, BSN, RN, CNHI. On the anonymous evaluation of the fellowship program, another nurse commented, "I always try to do my best work, but this fellowship was inspiring." The benefits of the program can be summarized as:

- Evidence-based practice processes have been integrated into clinical practice.
- Skills have increased for development, implementation, and evaluation of clinically relevant evidence-based practice projects.
- Staff nurses have been successful in applying evidence-based practice and have shown improved quality care.
- Professional growth and development of staff nurses has occurred at UCLA and has empowered these nurses to be champions of change.
- Innovative thinking has increased regard for practices that are efficient and effective in improving patient outcomes.
- Recruitment and retention of staff nurses has occurred by creating an environment that keeps the "best and brightest."
- Standards for Magnet measurement criteria have been met by nursing administration by providing opportunities to participate in research conducted and utilization for staff nurses.

The results of published reports of research utilization surveys demonstrate that staff nurses need support throughout the process of integrating evidence-based practice into delivery of care. They need to be fully informed about the process and research that is available to aid them in solving clinical practice issues by applying the latest evidence.

The staff nurse fellowship program at UCLA has been an important strategy at UCLA Health Care to facilitate evidence-based care. The benefits are multiple, with the single most important one being the benefit it offers our patients to receive quality, evidenced-based care.

**References**


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